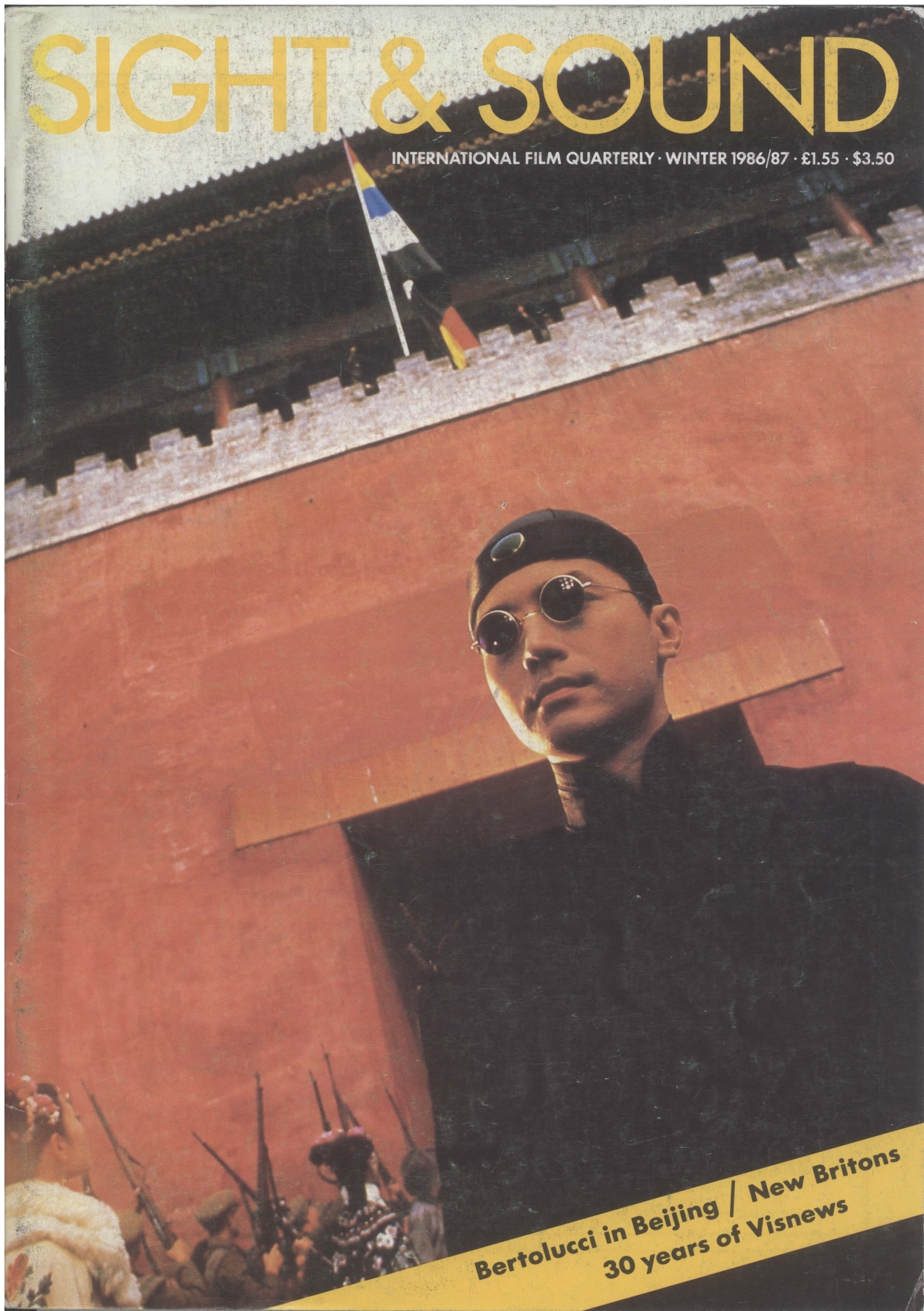


SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · WINTER 1986/87 · £1.55 · \$3.50



Bertolucci in Beijing / New Britons
30 years of Visnews

THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL FILM SCHOOL

Congratulates Past Students

Curtis Clark Photography
Ross Devenish Director
Bill Douglas Director/Screenplay
Tak Fujimoto Photography
Eduardo Guedes Co-Director/Co-Screenplay
Dina Hecht Producer/Director/Screenplay
Faris Kermani Director
Horace Ové Director
David Scott Photography
Danny Shneuer Photography
Gale Tattersall Photography

Extremities (U.S.A.)
The Happy Valley (U.K.)
Comrades (U.K.)
Ferris Bueller's Day Off (U.S.A.)
Rocinante (U.K.)
Broken Arrow 29 (U.K.)
The Sabri Brothers (U.K.)
Playing Away (U.K.)
The Sabri Brothers (U.K.)
Partisans of Vilna (U.S.A.)
Comrades (U.K.)

And Present Students

Gabriela Enis Director
Linda Gibson Director
Simon Howard Director
Stephen Irwin Director
Duncan Johnstone Director
Jacqueline O'Neill Director
Joey Pisano Director

Rain
One Cut Too Many
Sincerely Harold Washington
The House of Superhumanism
Two or Three Things I Know about Film
Perdition
Headaches and Happiness

On the selection of their films for the **30th LONDON FILM FESTIVAL**

And Congratulates Past Student

Horace Ové Director

Bhopal: Whom Shall We Tell (U.K.)

on winning the

1986 BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE AWARD FOR INDEPENDENT FILM AND TELEVISION

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · WINTER 1986/87 · VOLUME 56 No 1

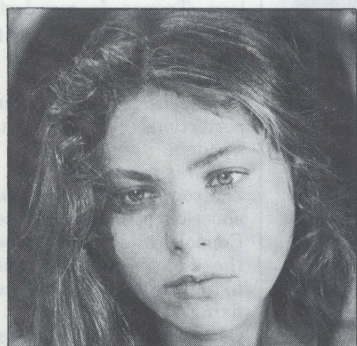
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On the cover:
Bernardo Bertolucci's
'The Last Emperor'.
Photo: Angelo Novi.

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Julia and Julia

Electronics and the human element

In a report seven years ago on *The Oberwald Mystery*, Antonioni's experiment in electronic film-making, I quoted his comment that his source, Cocteau's *The Eagle Has Two Heads*, had offered him 'a chance for intellectual non-commitment' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1979/80). What interested Antonioni was the opportunity given him by RAI to 'play around with colours' by filming on magnetic tape. Many of the film's critics were dismayed at this improbable and perhaps unnecessary encounter between the poet of fantastical decadence and the director of 'cinema of alienation' (even if Antonioni has long since outworn that uncomfortable mantle).

What was intriguing about *Oberwald* was the experiment with the new technology. It was, of course, soon to be out of date, but at least Antonioni had accepted the challenge of staking a year of his time to it. Experimentation continued into the 80s at RAI. Storaro shot a short piece in Venice under Montaldo's direction in which the first steps towards High Definition were taken; and RAI now displays another short, *Omieron*, a novella lasting 12 minutes, both in 35mm and on HDTV monitors to show that nothing is lost in quality in the transfer from tape to film. The next step had to be a feature shot entirely with Sony's HDTV techniques. The result is *Linea di Confine* ('Borderline') in Italian, *Julia and Julia* in English, which Peter Del Monte has directed and Giuseppe Rotunno photographed, with Kathleen Turner, Gabriel Byrne and Sting in the leads.

When RAI announced the start of shooting last July, many questioned the point of making a film for showing on High Definition sets, i.e. with 1,225 lines instead of the standard 625 as on European TV (and 525 in the US), when it is unlikely that the software will be widely available until well into the 90s. *Julia and Julia* will in fact be transferred to film and seen first in cinemas. Indeed, if RAI want to show it later on one of their own channels, they will show it at normal definition standards.

The 1988 Olympics will be transmitted by RAI in HDTV for those few who have sets to receive it. Maybe it will not take so long, as many are forecasting a universal system to be found for HDTV transmission. But RAI likes to think it is in the avant-garde of experimentation without having to worry, as American networks obviously do, about



Julia and Julia: Sting, Kathleen Turner.

whether it is going to be immediately profitable. One reason given for making *Julia and Julia* in HDTV was that it would cut post-production costs. If there was really to be a saving, surely the Americans would have been the first to take advantage of the new system? Indeed, now that *Julia and Julia* is in the cutting rooms—with a Hollywood professional, Michael Chandler, as editor—I doubt if anyone at RAI claims to be saving costs, seeing that all the initial processing was being done in Sony's Tokyo labs, printing at Technicolor in Rome and the cutting (on tape) in RAI's Milan studios, with further lab sessions in Tokyo when the final negative transfer has to be made.

The man responsible for pushing the project through is Massimo Fichera, now a Deputy Director-General of RAI in charge of technology. He was head of RAI's Channel 2 when *Oberwald* was launched. It is Fichera who has encouraged the collaboration not only with Sony but also with Japan's NHK and with CBS, which if not yet producing series in HDTV are also looking to the future. In a recent report, CBS estimates that 35mm film production will soon be superseded by high definition electronic cinematography and that the new format will trim production costs by more than 18 per cent.

That is of course thinking in terms of the production of TV series, which can cut their costs on actors alone—one of the highest items in the budget—if it means shooting in fewer days. For a feature film, especially at an experimental stage, perhaps it was too much to expect great savings. Even so, *Julia and Julia*

has not gone much over its \$8m budget, which is a lot for an average Italian film but not for one with a star like Kathleen Turner.

Peter Del Monte says: 'Though the electronic idea was at first off-putting—I had never worked in television—I soon discovered that there was little difference from making a film in the ordinary way. The enormous advantage was being able to see on monitor what we were shooting. But I was there directing the actors and not sitting in a control cabin round the corner. Certainly I haven't used High Definition to create special effects. I could correct colours but I had no interest in distorting them. For me it was a film.'

For Rotunno the problems were more apparent. 'Seeing results at once is not so important for me. After so many years, I believe I know what the film will look like on screen even before it is developed. The difference is that this particular type of TV camera has much lower sensitivity than the film camera. We have calculated that it is 50 ASA for interiors and not more than 20-25 ASA for exteriors even using filters. This means that if the light source which gives form to the images is low then the shadow areas are readable. But if the sensitivity obliges me to increase the light source it means that the contrasts are also increased, and I am obliged to increase the other lights if I want to keep the chromatic richness.'

Brisk movements by characters crossing the frame had to be avoided. Rotunno has read so much on HDTV, most of it very

difficult for even a professional to understand, that he intends to sit down and write an explanatory manual. One visitor to the Milan location was Francis Coppola, himself also a pioneer in electronic film-making. Asked for his opinion, the director of Hollywood's first electronic movie, *One from the Heart*, replied: 'It's certainly an interesting idea to use High Definition to make a feature film, but it is also interesting to experiment with HDTV for itself. From what I have seen, the image is perfect, Kathleen Turner is wonderful, the direction is brilliant, but possibly one ought to be going further with the new technique. Maybe one needs a little less cinematic perfection, fewer takes, more freedom.'

I was reminded of a visit to Zoetrope in 1981 during the shooting of *One from the Heart*. Coppola was not to be seen. On the set Vittorio Storaro was fixing the lights, Gene Kelly was fixing the choreography. In the control cabin Coppola was 'directing' and over the loudspeaker one heard his apologetic voice: 'Okay, folks, this is Francis, I'm with you even if you can't see me.' It was science-fiction direction. Maybe one needed the Italians to bring the human element back into electronics. The story of *Julia and Julia*, in case anyone is interested, is about a woman whose husband had died on their wedding day. One day she comes home and finds him there with the son they never had. From then on, Julia lives two lives, one with her dead husband and one with her live lover. Turner is the wife, Gabriel Byrne the husband, Sting the lover.

JOHN FRANCIS LANE

Hal Roach

Griffith's last employer

It seemed impossible that this tall, powerful man, with a big, fresh-complexioned, humorous face could really be the same Hal Roach whom history tells us is 94 years old. Could a man still so quick and clever really have been part of an Alaskan gold rush in 1908? 'I never panned for gold, whatever the books say. There were no jobs for kids in the gold fields, and I did any kind of work that came to hand.'

In 1912, after a variety of jobs and adventures, Harold Eugene Roach, born in Seattle in 1892, arrived in California, and inevitably gravitated to the infant movie industry. 'I was driving a mule train then, and of course I had got myself up with a stetson and scarf and buckskin and the lot. So when I saw this ad in the newspaper, Men wanted in Western costume, I went along.'

In no time he was earning five dollars a day as an extra. Another extra on the lot was Harold Lloyd; and by 1914 Roach had his own studio and was directing Lloyd in a 'Willie Work' series. By the end of the First World War his new studio at Culver City rivalled Sennett's Keystone for comedy production. 'Let's say I had a lot of luck.' The luck and money had only run out temporarily in 1915 when Roach went to work for the Essanay Studios, where Chaplin was the new star.

'We both lived in the Athletic Club, and went to the studios together by car. It was his car, of course. And we ate together every night. I learned a lot from him.' Like every other Hollywood comedy professional, Roach still regards Chaplin as the greatest of them all. He had less admiration for his dress sense at that period, and recalls a plot hatched with Edna Purviance to persuade him to buy a new suit. In the end they still failed to get him to part with the necessary \$15.

Roach belonged to the Babylonian days, when everyone who was anyone had his own yacht and aeroplane. He recalls princely weekend parties at Cecil B. De Mille's. 'You only took your dress pants and a shirt. Before dinner a valet came in with a great rack of Russian silk shirts to choose from.' Cecil had style. The venison came from Germany and the oysters from wherever they were best; and they ate peacock chow mein. 'He would bring out a huge chest with gifts for the ladies—mostly gorgeous lingerie. The only condition was that whatever they chose, the ladies would have to try it on, model it... Just the same, he would never have anything off colour. If someone made an off-colour joke, he was out.' Roach remembers a friend another Hollywood hedonist: 'They could have sent Arbuckle to gaol for a hundred things, but he wasn't guilty of what they put him on trial for.'

Roach was the last man to give work to D. W. Griffith. 'I knew him from the time he was making *Intolerance*, but later he had disappeared East somewhere. Then, when I was starting on *One Million Years B.C.*, he turned up at the studio one day. I invited him to lunch. And every day after that he came to the studio, and whenever I was free I would ask him to lunch with me. And then one day they told me in the restaurant: "You know, Mr Roach, when Mr Griffith comes to lunch with you, he has a proper lunch, but when he's alone he just orders coffee." So I understood he was not doing so well.

'So I asked him, would he like to do some work on the film. And he was very useful. He still knew his business. One day I asked

him to pick me out a girl. He came back a little later—he'd seen a hundred girls—and he said, "That's the one." He had made them all run barefoot around a post; and she was the only one, he said, who knew how to run. And it was Carole Landis. When the picture came to an end, there was no more money, and I hadn't a job for him any more. Afterwards people said that he was assigned to direct the picture, and I had put him off it. But that is nonsense. There was never any idea of his directing it.'

Roach's gifts included an unerring sense of comic chemistry. He teamed Laurel and Hardy, Our Gang (which was perhaps his biggest financial success over the years) and two female duos, Thelma Todd and ZaSu Pitts and Thelma Todd and Patsy Kelly—not to speak of the Dippy-Doo-Dads Comedies which starred only animals. He analyses the particular appeal of each of his stars with great shrewdness, and has his own explanation of why Laurel and Hardy were never so successful after they left his studio: 'Laurel was a fine comedian and a wonderful gagman; but when it came to stories, to picking stories, he was childish.'

He regards Charles Parrott, alias Charley Chase, as the best comedian and comedy director who ever worked for him: 'but it was booze killed him'. Looking at today's comedians, he feels that Benny Hill could be 'one of the greatest—only for one thing. His comedy is all below the belt.

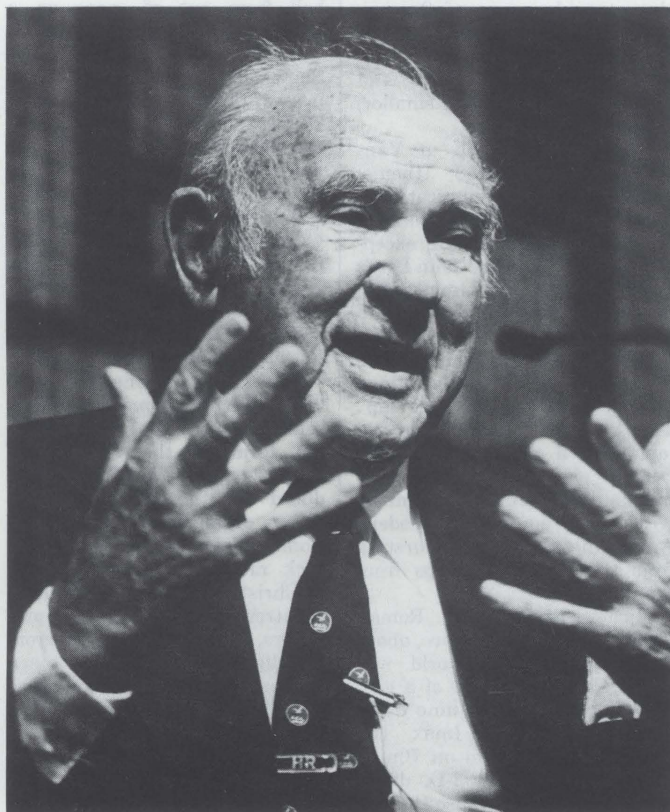
That's no use for comedy. It won't do for children, and in the end it's children who have made all the great comedians—Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, all of them.'

Unlike Sennett, Roach never worked before the camera as a comedian. Strangely, because as a raconteur his style and timing is still impeccable. At his Guardian lecture at the NFT he showed he could bring the house down with a pause, masterly in placing. The SRO NFT audience loved him, and he was clearly delighted to be mobbed and cheered and pestered for autographs, though he felt impelled to reproach them: 'You've been a nice crowd, but I'm disappointed. You only want to talk about the past. The past bores me. I'm more interested in tomorrow.' He has a lot of scripts, some projects for TV (he was one of the first Hollywood people to move that way, as early as 1954), was on his way to discuss a new idea with 20th Century Fox, and has strong ideas on how fiscal affairs should be organised to make production more viable in Britain.

The major annoyance he has suffered from age is deafness; last year for the first time he felt he could not vote for the Academy Awards, since he had not heard the films properly. Not that he takes even that sitting down. One of his projects in London was to research sophisticated infra-red systems for deaf-aids which might be installed in the Academy's cinema.

DAVID ROBINSON

Hal Roach at the National Film Theatre.
Photo: Sten M. Rosenlund.



Gdansk

Top dogs and top rats

The 1986 Gdansk festival featured new films by Wajda and Felix Falk, a visit by Polanski to show *Pirates* (which has a Polish stunt crew and one Polish actor) and several excellent films by directors unknown or little known in the West. Wajda's *Chronicle of Love Affairs*, which is reminiscent of his *Young Ladies of Wilko*, was shown outside the competition because, as Wajda says, he is now sixty and he has had enough of competitions. The main prize went to an adaptation of a cult novel by Edward Stachura, *Siekiereza* (*Axiliad*), a 'poem' in favour of suicide which is unlikely to reach the West if only because the dialogue appears to be untranslatable. The second prize went to a costume drama about a lady violinist in Czarist Russia, but the other main prizes went to two excellent, explicitly political films, one directed and the other scripted by Felix Falk.

Hero of the Year is a continuation of Falk's *Top Dog*. The same central character, Danielak, wants to revive his flagging career and dreams up a propaganda roadshow dedicated to civic virtue. He finds an ordinary worker who has saved some people in a gas explosion and takes him touring with dancers and a light show, giving talks about his life. Clearly the theme, as in *Top Dog*, is the manipulation of the decent by the unscrupulous. But whereas the previous film concludes with the success of the corrupt, *Hero of the Year* is much more ambiguous. As the roadshow nears its climax in Warsaw, the naive worker begins to realise that his honesty is being used and threatens to walk out. Predictably, Danielak tries to blackmail him into staying; then realises, after a final extravaganza goes disastrously wrong in front of the Party hierarchy and he is expected to take the blame, that he has himself been the victim of manipulation as well as its perpetrator.

The Great Race, scripted by Falk and directed by Jerzy Domaradzki, is set in the 50s. It too takes political manipulation as its theme. The setting is a week-long marathon dedicated to world peace, run by representatives of youth and factory groups. The organisers have a favourite for victory—someone who is politically reliable, who looks right and will say the right things—but as the race progresses it becomes clear that he will not win, and that one of the two likely victors is the son of the main defendant in a current political show trial, who must at



Jerzy Stuhr in *Hero of the Year*.

all costs be prevented from winning. Such manipulation relies on the enthusiasm of the young participants, for the race must be 'genuine'; they must be prepared to run themselves into the ground in the cause of world peace. This enthusiasm is beautifully, if sarcastically, caught in a scene where one of the young men seduces a girl by interspersing kisses with a garbled version of Marx's theory of the base and the superstructure.

Another theme is the friendship between the two central characters, a friendship—as Falk mildly puts it—'complicated by the situation', since one of the two is the political prisoner's son. This friendship is also what links the Stalinist past with the present. According to Jerzy Domaradski, the relationship between the young men—trust which grows out of a common resentment at mistreatment and fear of repression—exactly catches the atmosphere among people of the same age during the summer of 1981, and particularly during the events surrounding the shootings in Wrocław.

Especially striking among the shorts shown was Andrzej Czarnecki's *The Rat-Catcher*, based on an interview with a professional rat-catcher. He explains his methods in voiceover, with a video track of him at work, intercut with very striking scenes of rats at play filmed using an infra-red camera in normal night light. His method consists of winning the rats' trust, then poisoning them, finally hunting down the few leaders intelligent enough to have survived. But, he says at the end, nowadays the rats seem to know when he is coming, and the entire population moves out before his arrival. . . .

JERRY PALMER

Expo 86

An egg in your lap

Expo 67 in Montreal brought us pavilions full of peculiar pictures, lofty lessons of man and his universe, projected on ceilings and floors, and on split screens, multi-screens, banks of screens and very big screens. Most critics were overwhelmed and crept away to write lavish reviews of 'the cinema of the future'. Imax was developed after Expo 67 and is now established in museums and tourist attractions. Little else came, however, of the terribly expensive fairground experiments. So far as the future was concerned, cinemas and screens were to become smaller, not larger.

Twenty years later, at Vancouver's Expo 1986 (theme: transport and communications), almost nothing had changed since Montreal. The one exception was *Transitions*, Colin Low's CN-sponsored NFB Imax film in 3-D (the first) at the Canada Pavilion. It was vastly entertaining, but really amounted to little more than a highly refined version of 'a lion in your lap'. This time we got an egg in our lap, from a robot with a protruding arm. The film also reminds us of cinema's beginnings, with an enormous modern American locomotive bursting from the screen to gasps from the audience.

Michel Brault and Roman Kroitor's *Freedom to Move*, about transport round the world, was projected on the inside of a geodesic dome in images nine times larger than regular Imax. The Ontario Pavilion film on 70mm, in multi-image and 3-D, didn't work as a whole because the two

techniques are not compatible. Two of Canada's largest companies, Telecom and CPR, went to the United States for their films: the first to Disney for *Portraits of Canada* in Circlevision 360 degrees, which seemed to be the same 'portraits' we saw at the Bell Telephone Pavilion at Expo 67; and the second to Bob Rogers for the 70mm *Rainbow War*, a heavy-handed fantasy about unfriendly little people splashing each other with paint.

The BC Pavilion came up with *Zargon*, by Rob Turner and Peter O'Brian, in which Fairuza Balk (of *Return to Oz*) takes a red ball from out of space on a journey across the province. It was shot in Douglas Trumbull's Showscan process in which film passes through the camera at 60 fps; though it was hard to tell the difference. One real advance, however, was made at the GM Pavilion: Bob Rogers created a holographic stage show behind a glass wall in which actors playing Indians in a Haida Long House tell stories of their past and conjure up free-floating objects as if from fire. Everyone left asking, 'How was it done?'

Raduz Cincera, one of the devisers of *Kinoautomat*, the Czech sensation of Expo 67, was in top form in the Pavilion of Promise with *The Scroll*, produced by the American religious organisation Crossroads Communications. Bruce Stacey's rock musical multi-media 'Life of Christ' was presented in three theatres, using seven 35mm projectors, lasers, smoke, mirrors and lights. The message was a promise of 'love and peace in the world'; the narrator none other than Malcolm Muggeridge.

The most likeable films were the 'ordinary movies' in the pavilions of the Northwest Ter-

ritories, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Allan Booth's *The Emerging North* gave us a moody impression of the Territories and its native people; while Zale Dalen's *My Province* had a girl on stage talking enthusiastically about Saskatchewan to her friends and family on screen, and herself eventually becoming part of the picture. From Alberta came Peter Campbell's 4-minute *Ballet Syncrude*, about a little ballerina who dreams she is dancing with a corps de ballet of oil workers on the tar sands. Humour and a touch of gentleness, it seems, will win out over light and sound and big screens every time. This little picture will possibly still be remembered when the next Expo rolls around, and the rest have been long forgotten.

GERALD PRATLEY

Elem Klimov

Beatles in Piccadilly Circus . . .

1986 was an important year for the Soviet film industry, including as it did the first modern film explicitly critical of Stalin, Tengiz Abuladze's *Repentance*. Likewise, Mr Gorbachev's commitment to 'frank debate' at home has meant that several films and TV documentaries, shelved for years as controversial, have at last been released. Sixty films are being re-examined and so far half have passed the fitness test. Among these are Alexei Gherman's *Road Check* (1972) and *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (1983), the latter shown at the 1986 London Film Festival; Andrei Konchalovsky's *Asya's Happiness* (1966); Gleb Panfilov's *Theme* (1979); Larissa Shepitko's subversive documentary *The Homeland of Electricity* (1968); and Elem Klimov's *Farewell* (1982), also at the LFF.

Klimov has in the past been one of the most shelved of contemporary Soviet cineastes, so it is a pleasant irony—or a poetic justice—that as newly elected chief of the Union of Soviet Film-makers, he has been one of the major figures involved in this setting straight of the artistic record.

Klimov's films are idiosyncratic, to say the least. Three, including *Farewell*, have been glimpsed in the West. The war film *Go and See* (LFF 1985) is soon to be released commercially, and a March season at the NFT will allow us to reassess *Agonia*, his eccentric study of Rasputin, and to sample four films previously unseen outside the Soviet Union.

Audiences who on the evidence so far consider Klimov rather a dour director will be surprised, I believe, by a vein of comedy and

irony. His diploma film, for example, *Welcome, But No Unauthorised Admission* (1964), is a charming, simple tale set in a Young Pioneers' camp busily preparing for parents' day. The hero, Ivanchin, expelled for delinquency, makes his way back to camp under cover of darkness. (He is unable to bear the thought of his grandmother's reproaches.) His friends rally round to protect him, and the rest of the film shows their mild guerrilla attempts to outwit the authorities and scupper the speech day celebrations.

It is doubtless going much too far to see the camp, with its petty restrictions and publicly ratified lies, as a metaphor for Soviet society. What is plain, however, is that the director detects unmistakable elements of kitsch in the state's habitual attitude towards children—elements which it might not, at the time, have been prudent to emphasise. The camp's geography is wickedly particularised. Plastercast statues of virtuous young people engaged in Soviet pursuits line the entrance arcade. The omnipresent rhymed slogans spread across banners have the sort of ghastly uplift characteristic of totalitarian societies, their instant reversability ('Children are masters of the camp') reminding one of Orwell.

The 'attack' should not be over-emphasised, however, since the film works perfectly well on a humane level, its point being made through traditional comic irony. I have not seen Klimov's next film, the long held-back *Adventures of a Dentist* (1965), nor the movie which he took over and completed after Mikhail Romm's death, *None the less, I Believe* (1973). (Why was *Adventures* suppressed? It seems that the dentist was somewhat too transparent a disguise for the hemmed-in Soviet artist.) *Sport, Sport, Sport*, however, made in the early 1970s, which I have seen, is exceptionally interesting.

Like *Agonia*, it is another of Klimov's bold raids on the archives, a spectacular compilation picture of world sporting highlights, intercut with 'documentary' sequences of the director's contriving. These are extremely bizarre: a fantasy about London, for example, has a group of Beatle-haired guitar players on horseback riding across Piccadilly Circus. Elsewhere he interviews swimmers and athletes about the rigours of their profession, but with such deadpan irony as constantly to remind one of Makavejev.

Sport as the quintessentially mindless totalitarian activity: can a Soviet director really be saying this? Maybe, and maybe not. Beyond irony—beyond ideological critique—there is a

scientific and almost behaviourist interest in human endeavour pushed to its utmost. How far can the human psyche be subjected to pressure and still survive? Such philosophical and psychological speculations, here in an experimental and humorous context, are put to solemn, serious effect in *Go and See*, to date Klimov's most impressive achievement.

MARK LE FANU

Venice

A Welles curio and an Angelopoulos masterpiece

The 43rd Venice Festival was disturbed by customary festival squalls. The only notable one, perhaps, was a demand by the critics (with the French to the fore) that *A Room with a View* be disqualified from competition since it had already opened outside its country of origin. The film's Italian distributor, hearing this, prayed for the attendant publicity. The festival director, Gian Luigi Rondi, forty years a critic, invoked Article 4 of the Biennale rules. This apparently entitled him to overrule the rules. *Room with a View* stayed, but took no major prize. A more serious problem was the Lido's dwindling number of cinemas. Unless he had more screens, Rondi threatened, he or his successor would show only 24 films in 1987—as in the old days, before prizes, when selection itself was an award of merit.

In retrospect, it is the little noticed odd balls which stick in the mind. Set in a theatre, where a distraught man with a message tries repeatedly to halt the performance of a melodrama, *Mon*

Cas failed to please even the director Manoel de Oliveira's most ardent supporters. It struck me, however, that despite its length and its talkativeness, this bold mixture of Samuel Beckett and the apparently complete Book of Job was far more inventive, sure-footed and at times spikily amusing than another, albeit more coolly fastidious attempt at recycling theatrical convention, Alain Resnais' *Mélo*.

Oliveira uses comic repetition and our old friend the angry man in the audience (an objector to the distraught man's interventions) to singular effect; and the end is a *tour de force*, uniting in a single shot cinema, theatre and the video revolution. Resnais' somnambulist adaptation of a play by Henry Bernstein, about two self-satisfied classical musicians (André Dussollier and Pierre Arditi) and the woman between them (Sabine Azéma), is punctuated by comically shrill outbursts which appear to poke fun at the genre. Taken all in all, however, *Mélo* is a puzzling example of melodrama for its own sake.

Kaizo Hayashi made a notable debut with *To Sleep to Dream* (Japan), a black and white kidnap mystery set in the 50s. Titles substitute for spoken dialogue, though punches thud and telephones jangle: a potentially tiresome conceit which in fact occasionally registers with surprising poetic power. The plot concerns a grande dame of the silent cinema (hence perhaps the titles) and an abstracted detective whose inspiration derives from an exclusive diet of hard-boiled eggs. The action speeds, if a little breathlessly, and there are some nice surrealist touches. One duty

of the detective's juvenile assistant is to collect, from among the gadgets and nicknacks of his master's lair, the eggs of the resident hen.

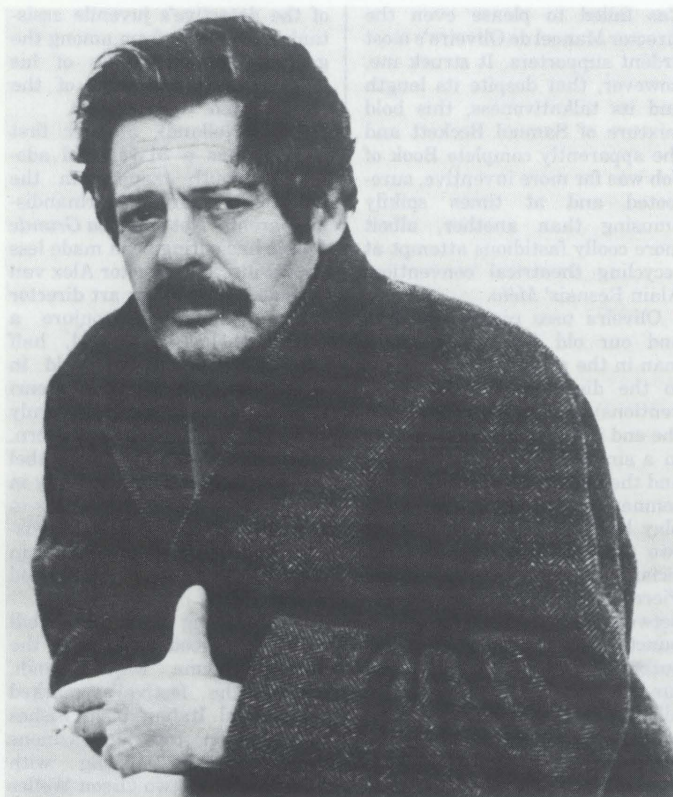
Abel (Holland), another first feature, has a 31-year-old adolescent youth trapped in the home of his horrible gourmandising parents. Not since *La Grande Bouffe* has eating been made less appetising. The director Alex van Warmerdam and his art director Harry Ammerlaan conjure a claustrophobic, half real, half expressionistic urban world in which the attractive hero (Henri Garcin) is encumbered by truly suffocating parental concern. Having exacted his revenge, Abel finds he can at last bisect a fly in midair with a pair of scissors (a trick he has been vainly practising throughout the film): an absurd, sexual farce, dyed deepest black.

The opening night triple bill revealed a good deal about the auteur cinema which Rondi, despite the festival's marked commercial Italian bias, wishes to champion, contrary fashions notwithstanding. Along with *Mon Cas* were two Orson Welles 'premieres', an AFI documentary previewing the remarkable 'Four Men on a Boat' material of the unfinished documentary drama *It's All True*, and a lost 'colour piece', *Portrait of Gina* (as it was billed), disowned with reason by CBS and abandoned by its director in the Hotel Ritz, Paris.

Made at the time of *Touch of Evil*, the portrait of Gina Lollobrigida survives as a three-reel roughcut, in places very rough, with holes for the sponsor's messages. One appreciates the dismay of CBS. Backed by the zither theme from *The Third Man*,

Welcome, But No Unauthorised Admission.





Marcello Mastroianni in *The Beekeeper*.

Welles addresses the camera with his eyes as much as with his voice, then distracts attention from the paltry material with lightning, almost jump cuts and poster collages of film stars' legs. He strolls about Rome and the Lazio countryside in halfhearted quest of the elusive Gina, symbol of glamorous Italian womanhood.

Two surprised film people, Rosano Brazzi and Vittorio De Sica, are roped in for interrogation; but Welles cavalierly cuts away before we can properly hear their answers. At last, after teasing delays, the magician finds himself inside Gina's villa. The queen descends the stairs. The subject of their brief conversation? Her troubles with the taxman (plus emphatic gestures). End of picture. Welles unashamedly mocks this impossible commission (though presumably having taken the cash) with flashes of that legerdemain he later used with much greater skill in *F for Fake*: a curio. The imperishable Gina Lollobrigida was in the audience; her reaction, however, was not recorded.

Among the festival's name directors, one stood out, Theo Angelopoulos. At the time of writing, Angelopoulos is cutting 20 minutes from the version of *O Melissokomos* (*The Beekeeper*) which premiered on the Lido. The director's stately sequence shots, for the first time slightly modified by intercutting, and his long-held scenes, in which little appears to happen on the surface and which are stretched almost to breaking

before a decisive cut relieves the tension and takes the breath away, demand length and if necessary more length. One hundred and forty minutes did not seem a second too long; but Angelopoulos contracted for two hours and we shall have to wait for the trimmed results.

A middle-aged man, Spyros, beset by intimations of mortality and a sense of almost catatonic gloom, makes a spring journey across a desolate modern Greece to tend his scattered colonies of bees. It is a Greece of sprawling cement works, gleaming impersonal filling stations, fast-food vans in traditional cobbled squares, all caught with the cold, beautiful eye of Giorgos Arvanitis' camera. The final blow is Spyros' self-inflicted sexual humiliation in the arms of a hitchhiker (Nadia Mourouzi, of whom we shall hear more), whose path has tormentingly crossed his throughout the film. This bravura scene is played out beneath the screen of a defunct fleapit. Next day, Spyros tips over his hives and lies on the hillside among the uncaring swarms to which, like his late, unremembered father, he has given his life.

Marcello Mastroianni (speaking the few words of Greek the script requires) gives a hunched, heavy-limbed performance, without any of the self-regarding Italian melancholy with which he has become associated. It is a film of looks, of gestures and stillnesses.

JOHN PYM

Hal Wallis

An appreciation

Among the very limited collection of movie memorabilia I amassed while researching *A New Deal in Entertainment*, my book on Warner Brothers in the 1930s, there is one small item I particularly treasure. It is a (pirated) photocopy of a studio memo. 'What have you done about the Humphrey Bogart contract?' it asks. 'I want to get this man signed up.' It is dated 8 November 1935, a year before *The Petrified Forest*, and it is signed 'Hal Wallis'.

Hal B. Wallis (the 'B' stood for Brent) died on 5 October 1986, at the age of 88, in Rancho Mirage, California, a desert oasis just outside Palm Springs. To most compulsive watchers of Saturday afternoon television, he will probably be remembered as the producer of the Elvis Presley movies and the Martin and Lewis comedies. But he did have a few other credits, too: around 500 films carry his name, 32 of them Oscar winners.

Wallis was head of production at Warner Bros from 1933 to 1942; and it was Wallis, not Jack Warner, who was the major force behind that studio's 'golden age'. His career encompassed such films as *Little Caesar*, *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, *Sergeant York*, *High Sierra*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and *Now, Voyager*. He produced *Casablanca*, too, though Jack Warner bounded out of his seat quicker and picked up the Oscar—an affront which Wallis never forgot.

Like many studio producers, Wallis went semi-independent in the 1940s, subsequently putting his name to films like *Come Back Little Sheba* (one of his favourites), *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, *The Sons of Katie Elder* (on which he met his second wife, actress Martha Hyer), *True Grit* and *Anne of the Thousand Days*. *Rooster Cogburn*, the disappointing 1975 sequel to *True Grit*, was his last film.

I had no real notion of Wallis' importance when I began to research the Warners book. But, as I worked my way through the Warners production files—memos and daily shooting reports, budget sheets and contracts, stored in thousands of cardboard boxes at the University of Southern California—it became clear that Wallis was a lot more than a 'front office man': he was the key to the whole studio system. Hollywood has bred maybe two dozen great directors. Wallis, the production files revealed, belonged to a more select group, comprising perhaps half a dozen people from 1920 to

now: he was one of the great Hollywood producers, the men who pulled it all together, shaping and tuning the film and making it what it was. And he was a master of the 'classic Hollywood narrative'. 'The best story editor I've ever known,' Lillian Hellman called him.

I met Wallis only once, but the meeting left such an impression that it is worth recounting. Even the route instructions are memorable: 'Take the San Bernardino Freeway past Palm Springs. Take the Thousand Palms exit, make a left on to Bob Hope Drive, then left again on to Frank Sinatra Drive...'

The walls of the Wallis living room were lined with Frederick Remingtons, but what dominated it all was a four-foot wooden statue of 'the Duke', a family friend. It was the late summer of 1981, and Wallis had recently been in a serious car crash from which, I suspect, he never fully recovered. He was walking with the aid of a frame. 'You'll have to speak up,' Mrs Wallis whispered as we moved painfully across the lawn towards the guest house. 'Mr Wallis doesn't hear too well.'

My heart sank: this was clearly going to be an hour of embarrassment, as I painstakingly enunciated simple questions and received vague and whispered answers. I needn't have worried: Wallis might walk and hear with difficulty, but the other faculties were functioning as they had throughout his 50-year producing career. His recall was astonishing, the tenor of his answers such as to make me the one who risked embarrassment. Neither nostalgically reminiscent nor offhandedly dismissive, his replies were courteous, complete and immensely illuminating.

That interview was a turning point for me. By the end of it, I had made a resolve which has been with me ever since: to respect the professional filmmaker's intelligence and skill, whatever conclusions I might ultimately reach about the resulting films. If I could not have faced this man with what I eventually wrote about Warner Bros in the 1930s—if I wrote about a lifetime's career in terms he couldn't even disagree with because he couldn't understand them—then I shouldn't write about it at all.

For that afternoon in Rancho Mirage—and for *Black Legion* and *High Sierra*, *Now, Voyager* and *Casablanca*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*—I shall always be grateful to Hal B. Wallis. And so should anyone with a love of, or a fear of, or a fascination with Hollywood and what it has done to and for us.

NICK RODDICK

1986: Obituary

NOVEMBER 1985: Ado Kyrrou, Franco-Greek dissenter on surrealism and erotica, occasional director; Kathleen Ryan, invariably tearful Irish actress (*Odd Man Out*, *The Sound of Fury*); André Hunebelle, director of adventure films (*Les Mystères de Paris*, *Fantômas Contre Scotland Yard*).

DECEMBER 1985: Henry Freulich, who shot dozens of Columbia B-pictures; Roger Leenhardt, influential French documentarist who made only two theatrical features, *Les Dernières Vacances* and *Rendez-vous de Minuit*; Howard Rodman, scriptwriter (*Coogan's Bluff*, *Charley Var- rick*); Jack H. Skirball, independent producer (*Shadow of a Doubt*, *A Matter of Time*); Victor Vicas, peripatetic director of documentaries and fiction (*The Wayward Bus*); Anne Baxter; Phil Karlson, tough guy director (*Tight Spot*, *The Phenix City Story*); Philip Mackie, writer for television (*The Naked Civil Servant*); Renato Castellani, prestigious director of the post-war years (*Due Soldi di Speranza*, *Romeo and Juliet*); Ricky Nelson, balladeer, the teenage gunslinger of *Rio Bravo*; Sam Spiegel, producer extraordinary.

JANUARY: Una Merkel, who sang 'Shuffle off to Buffalo' with Ginger Rogers and had a memorable punch-up with Dietrich in *Destry Rides Again*; Arthur Alcott, 'production controller for Pinewood Studios', as his statutory credit read on countless movies; Christopher Isherwood, who wrote for films directly (*Diane*) and indirectly (*Cabaret*); Donna Reed, whose face exemplified sincerity (*They Were Expendable*, *From Here to Eternity*); Lamar Boren, leading underwater cameraman; Willard Van Dyke, maker of documentaries, notably during World War Two (*The City*, *Pacific Northwest*); Gordon MacRae, bland baritone (*Oklahoma*, *Carousel*); Lilli Palmer.

FEBRUARY: Alfred Vohrer, director of German Westerns (*Winnetou und sein Freund Old Firehand*) and thrillers (*Die toten Augen von London*); Dandy Nichols, invincible sceptic of the small screen (*Till Death Us Do Part*) and large (*O Lucky Man*); Ove Brusendorff, critic, founder of the Danish Film Museum; Ben Nye Sr, make-up expert; Brian Aherne, English gentleman in Hollywood (*Song of Songs*, *The Great Garrick*); Guy Warrack, composer, especially for documentaries (*A Defeated People*, *A Queen Is Crowned*); Howard Da Silva, deep-voiced actor (*The Lost Weekend*, *Two Years Before*

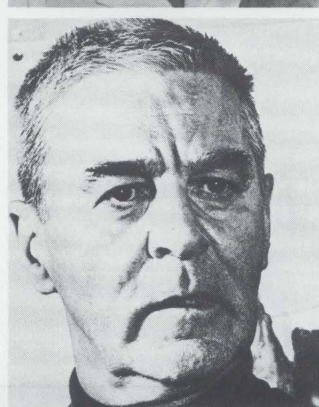
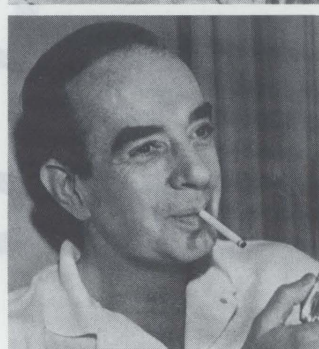
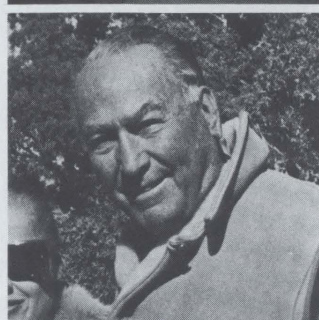
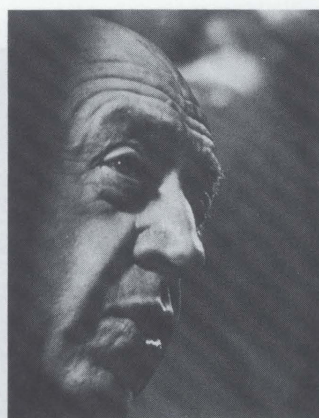
the Mast) and noted blacklistee; Paul Stewart, supporting player specialising in sorrowful stooges, from *Citizen Kane* on; Adolfo Celi, chunky conveyor of sinister authority, Cesare Borgia in the TV series; Dorothea Wieck, the sympathetic teacher in *Mädchen in Uniform*, briefly in Hollywood; Pasquale Festa Campanile, writer/director, mostly of comedies (*La Matriarca*, *Adulterio all'Italiano*).

MARCH: Ray Milland; Sir Huw Wheldon, television presenter and executive; Derek Farr, leading man for Asquith (*Freedom Radio*, *Quiet Wedding*) and others; Charles Starrett, romantic lead of the early 30s (*Mask of Fu Manchu*, *Mr Skitch*) then children's cowboy hero; Herman Blumenthal, production designer at Fox (*The Three Faces of Eve*, *Hello Dolly*); James Cagney; Jerry Paris, supporting actor turned director (*Viva Max*).

APRIL: Chester Erskine, variously producer (*All My Sons*), writer and director (*Take One False Step*); Nitin Bose, prolific Indian film-maker; Jean Genêt, whose works included the short film *Un Chant d'Amour*; Jean-Jacques Gautier, novelist and critic; Harold Arlen, one of the century's foremost popular song writers ('Stormy Weather', 'One for My Baby') for both stage and screen; Otto Preminger; Broderick Crawford, specialist in brutalism (*All the King's Men*, *Il Bidone*); Bessie Love; Walter Gutman, maker of 'experimental' films, as producer (*Pull My Daisy*) and director (*Grape Dealer's Daughter*); Robert Stevenson, director, from Gainsborough (*Tudor Rose*) to Disney (*Mary Poppins*).

MAY: Elisabeth Bergner, actress of repute, first in Germany (*Der träumende Mund*) then in England (*As You Like It*); Allen Boretz, comedy writer (*Room Service*, *Up in Arms*); Martin Gabel, one-off director (*The Lost Moment*), then exclusively actor; Sterling Hayden, whose uneasy stardom in the 50s heralded a career as eminent character actor in following decades; Gunnar Björnstrand; Yakima Canutt, superstar stuntman; Tony Wright, Rank he-man of the mid-50s (*Tiger in the Smoke*, *Seven Thunders*).

JUNE: Lya Lys, who sucked a statue's toe in *L'Age d'Or*, then went to Hollywood (*Confessions of a Nazi Spy*); Anna Neagle; Grace Wyndham-Goldie, influential executive at the BBC; Richard Cawston, maker of TV documentaries; Alan Jay Lerner, writer and lyricist (*An American in Paris*, *My Fair Lady*); Nigel Stock, dependable British supporting actor (*The Dam Busters*, *Victim*).



Top to bottom: Otto Preminger, Hal Wallis, Dandy Nichols, Vincente Minnelli, Gunnar Björnstrand.

JULY: Rudy Vallee, prototype crooner, the rueful millionaire, in *Palm Beach Story*; Frederick Kohner, scriptwriter at Universal, creator of *Gidget*, the pre-Nabokov nymph; Emil Nofal, South African film-maker (*Kimberley Jim*, *The Winners*); Harold Schuster, editor then director, notably of early colour film *Wings of the Morning*; Vincente Minnelli; John Alcott, Kubrick's cameraman from *2001 to The Shining*; Robert Woog, producer (*Nuit de Décembre*, *Germinal*).

AUGUST: Helen Mack, 30s heroine (*The Son of Kong*, *The Milky Way*); Emilio Fernandez, prominent Mexican director (*Maria Candelaria*, *La Perla*) with a thriving parallel career as a Hollywood heavy; John Trevelyan, Secretary of the British Board of Film Censors, 1958-1971; Waldon O. Watson, sound recordist with a plethora of Oscar nominations; Paola Mori, widow of Orson Welles, his leading lady in *Confidential Report*; Hermione Baddeley, dumpy portrayer of duchesses, landladies and sundry British types.

SEPTEMBER: Blanche Sweet, actress for Griffith at Biograph, whose film career ended with the silents; Ray Nazarro, director of numerous routine Westerns; Rafael Gil, Spanish director (*La Guerra de Dios*, *El Gran Día*); Pat Phoenix, icon of British soaps; Brian Desmond Hurst, veteran Anglo-Irish director (*Dangerous Moonlight*, *Hungry Hill*); Robert Helpmann, cinematically best remembered for his contribution to *The Red Shoes*.

OCTOBER: Hal Wallis, executive/producer first at Warners then Paramount, with an unusually sure eye for worthwhile projects; David Hand, pioneer animator, director of Disney's *Snow White* and, postwar, the head of Rank's short-lived cartoon studio; Boris Leven, production designer with a long and illustrious set of credits (*The Shanghai Gesture*, *The Color of Money*); Keenan Wynn, non-stop actor for the last forty years (*Kiss Me Kate*, *Nashville*); Alfred Bauer, critic, founder of the Berlin Film Festival; Forrest Tucker, craggy second-string leading man in the 40s and 50s; Robert Arthur, producer at Universal (the *Francis* series) and Columbia (*The Big Heat*).

NOVEMBER: Harry Brown, novelist (*A Walk in the Sun*) and scriptwriter (*A Place in the Sun*); Howard Thomas, one of the overlords of British commercial TV; Siobhan McKenna, intermittent visitor to films from the stage (*Daughter of Darkness*, *Playboy of the Western World*); Scatman Crothers, black actor (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Shining*); Cary Grant.

Compiled by BOB BAKER

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Nina Davies

'Look at them now...'



The profiles that follow look at a group of newcomers to the British film industry, from varied backgrounds and at different stages of career development. The 'look at them nows' of today frequently evolve into the faded 'where are they nows' of tomorrow; but their careers should be watched with interest.

In such a complex industry, it is difficult to point to any specific area from which the next generation of filmmakers may be expected to emerge. The people discussed here come from backgrounds as diverse as acting and team-making. The graduation screenings of the National Film and Television School regularly point to future success, and the recently established Fuji Film Awards (won in 1986 by students from the Royal College of Art) may also give an indication of significant talent. Pop video production is often cited as the source of the next wave in British films, the successors to the Parker/Puttnam/Ridley Scott generation spawned by the commercials industry. But the neat concept of a post-Hovis generation of filmmakers, trained in the new type of

commercial with the singing and dancing product, is largely mythical.

Directors such as Julien Temple and Bernard Rose, who have graduated from promos to features, were students at the National Film and Television School before their association with the music industry. Muscle Films (Mike Coulson and Nicola Bruce) have made a short story film, *Wings of Death*, as well as promos; with luck they will direct a feature. They are just another example of young people who work in promos because, as a new and expanding industry, it provides an available area for employment, rather than a grounding for future careers in direction. For technicians and producers it may be different—Sarah Radclyffe, Tim Bevan and Eric Fellner all successfully went

cold from promo producing into feature film production.

Young talent doesn't necessarily imply new talent. Tim Bevan, in his late twenties, has already co-produced two feature films (*My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Personal Services*). Last year, 26-year-old Eric Fellner raised finance for both Alex Cox's films. Directors Julien Temple (*Absolute Beginners*) and Alex Cox (*Sid and Nancy*) may be very youthful, but the familiarity engendered by the media attention they have received hardly lets one think of them as 'new'.

And new talent shouldn't be equated with youth. Several people already highly experienced in one area of film production have recently moved to another. The Monty Python writer/actor Terry Jones has directed his first feature,

Personal Services; lighting cameraman Chris Menges will be directing a feature this year. Colin Callender, a very experienced television producer, has produced his first feature film, Peter Greenaway's *Belly of an Architect*. Like Paul Mayersberg (*Captive*), Bruce Robinson has moved from writing to directing his first film.

Above all, it's not just talent that assures success in the film industry. It's motivation, determination and luck. It's shove and push and who you know as well as Art.

Matthew Jacobs

Writer and Director

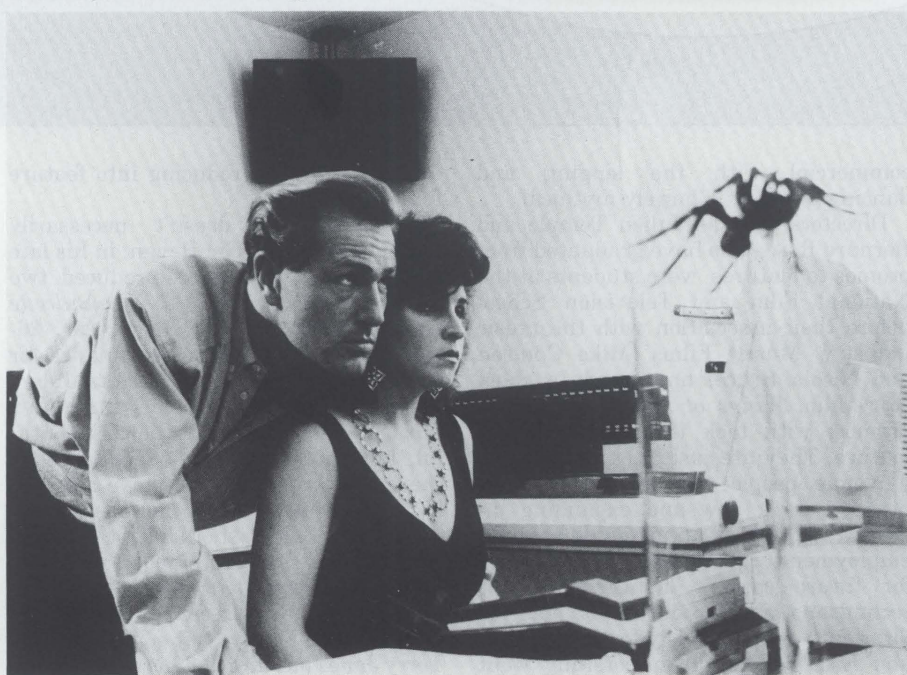
Matthew Jacobs' NFTS graduation film was an introspective piece about a blind piano tuner eaten by leaves in a wood. In a reciprocal arrangement with the School, it was screened in Czechoslovakia, where a significant criticism was that Jacobs had rejected an opportunity to make a political film. What was he doing in a country of free expression producing something so indulgent? 'The commercial censorship in Britain that stops films exploring ideas is far worse than political censorship,' says Jacobs, a recurring theme in his conversation. 'The best type of British film is *Room with a View*, in the good old tradition of historical romance. The worst type are those that imitate American films. To get things made here, you have to have an American distribution deal; and to get the finance means compromising a good idea.' This feeling has been heightened by a recent visit to the US. He is ambitious to direct features but, refer-

ring to the careers of Tony Scott (*Top Gun*) and Russell Mulcahy (*Highlander* and the next *Rambo* movie), asserts that it is important to him to make his first feature in Britain, in spite of his criticisms of the industry.

Jacobs has directed several promos, remembering dolefully that he got all the awful songs. He has also directed a short film, *Vardo*, from Jonathan David's winning entry in the *Sunday Times* screenwriting competition. This was a frustrating experience, he explains, as the script was approved by committee consensus. Although he is keen to stress his directorial background—and future—he got the opportunity to see how 'disastrous' his writing skills could be at the NFTS, and it's an area in which he has proved both productive and successful. During his time at the School he wrote a sci-fi film, *2084*, directed by Roger Christian, and a *Ninja* picture. 'They're both awful. I was broke at the time and needed the money.' He wrote a script to be directed by Terry Windsor (who made *Party Party*) for Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment, which was shelved during the Cannon takeover, and had an abortive attempt at a project with Hanif Kureishi, writer of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. In all, Jacobs



Right: Matthew Jacobs.
Below: *Smart Money*.
Bruce Payne and Alexandra Pigg.



has written ten screenplays, of which three have been produced, and he is far happier with the result of *Smart Money* than with *Ninja Mission* or *2084*.

Smart Money was a BBC production directed by Bernard Rose, another NFTS graduate who has since directed pop videos such as Frankie Goes to Hollywood's *Relax* orgy extravaganza. Jacobs describes the film as a product of his own guilt, 'Not Jewish, but insipid, self-effacing guilt that comes from being brought up in Britain.' When questioned about other preoccupations in his writing, he says that he would like to tackle the taboo of incest, 'the basis of good drama from *Oedipus* to *Chinatown*'. Another Jacobs and Rose project for which Tim Bevan is raising finance is *Paperhouse*, which Jacobs describes as 'uncategorisable' but, when pressed, 'about mortality and love'.

He is at present working with Gérard Brach, Roman Polanski's co-writer, on the first draft of a thriller set in Hong Kong. Jacobs is excited about the project, which he feels is his first powerful and original work. 'At last at the age of thirty I have something to say.' He is enthusiastic about working in a positive atmosphere where things get made: 'There are no problems, only solutions.'

Working with the French writer leads him to reflect on the quality of British screenwriting (and praise the United States, where film-makers are encouraged to write). 'There aren't many British writers who are cinematically motivated; they're all novelists or journalists. Shaffer (*Amadeus*) and Welland (*Chariots of Fire*) are both theatre oriented and we can't get away from that tradition.' He also argues that there is too much hype and intellectualising about film in Britain. 'It's like the theatre ten or fifteen years ago. Films like *Mona Lisa* are praised to the hilt because they're half good. SIGHT AND SOUND is not a magazine I read...'

Jacobs' recommendations of new British talent include two directors who have graduated from the NFTS, Jenny Wilkes and Roger Christian ('sorely neglected'), cameraman Mike Southon and art director John Beard.

Hugo Luczyc-Wyhowski

Production Designer

When Hugo Luczyc-Wyhowski worked as the production designer on *Prick Up Your Ears*, he had to construct a psychiatrist's office, and during his research found one in a prison in Southend-on-Sea. In the corner stood a skeleton with a plastic bag over its head. He wanted to include this in the film, but it was rejected as implausible: a case of real life being stranger than fiction.

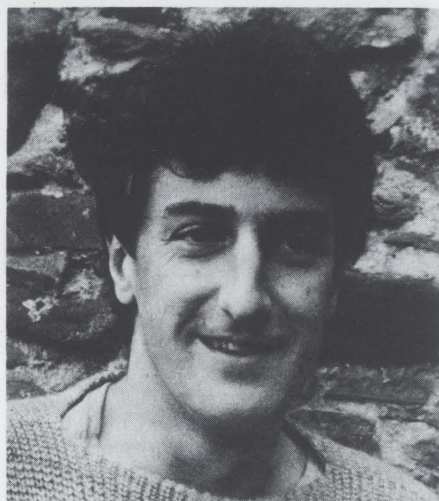
After a Fine Art degree, Wyhowski (his father is Polish) made tea on a



Right: Hugo Luczyc-Wyhowski.
Above: *Prick Up Your Ears*.
Alfred Molina as Kenneth Halliwell.

Channel 4 series, worked in the Art Department of a Channel 4 film and, in contrast, was employed as a VTR engineer. He then was art director on several promos, an experience about which he is dismissive as a training ground. 'You don't learn the basic structure of the industry... you learn more making tea on a Channel 4 film than on ten promos.' He worked as assistant art director on Nicolas Roeg's *Insignificance*—'With Roeg you can spend a week looking for a specific table and finish the rest of the set in thirty minutes.' This experience encouraged an interest in using props with reference to themes in the narrative of the film. Through further promo work he met director Stephen Frears, who asked him to do the production design for *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Since then, 29-year-old Wyhowski has worked on *Car Trouble*, *Personal Services*, David Leland's story about Cynthia Payne directed by Terry Jones, and *Prick Up Your Ears*, which Frears has directed from Alan Bennett's script about Joe Orton. Wyhowski is keener to discuss the latter two productions.

The limited resources of such low-budget productions have not provided Wyhowski with an opportunity to let rip creatively. In contrast, he is now working on commercials with, relatively speaking, much more lavish budgets, until his next feature. For all his appreciation of European avant-garde cinema, he has a desire to work on a special effects film, relishing the prospect of 'green slime oozing out of the walls...' Yet Wyhowski still aims to take things further than they are in reality. Or maybe what we think they are in a reality that has skulls grinning through plastic bags in Southend prisons. He refers to the 'hyper-real' laundrette which screens videos of fighting crocodiles, 'pushed to the limits of belief'. In



Prick Up Your Ears, there is a gents toilet three times the size of a normal one.

Wyhowski argues against what he perceives as a contemporary feeling that sets should be unnoticeable, as realistic as possible. 'I like to whittle down what's there, really to be more specific about the way the figure interacts with the environment.' Above the demands of the script, he describes his sources as 'completely eclectic', ranging from photography, painting and sculpture to everyday experience. He takes a great many photographs. Cinematic influences include Raul Ruiz (specifically *Three Crowns of the Sailor*) and 'any films that use simple images that you can dwell on visually.' Again he stresses that it is attention to the background of the image which is essential, referring to the films of Fellini, Visconti, Coppola and, although 'decorative', Powell and Pressburger.

But his influences are primarily European. He has no desire to work in the United States and would ideally like to experience the 'whole feel' of making a film that is European rather than British. He characterises contemporary British cinema by suggesting that the films are either about gangsters (played

by Bob Hoskins and Michael Caine) or intellectual Wetherby angst-ridden examination types, although he is cheered by the success of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. If he is generally critical about the product, he supports the way the British industry is constructed. 'I'm not a supporter of the power of the hierarchy but of the way jobs are demarcated and the whole enterprise works because of that demarcation.'

He describes himself as a skilled delegator, though he adds ominously, 'I'm not always diplomatic...' Wyhowski also has a remarkable practical facility. He gestures at a packet of cigarettes, saying that he could make one absolutely identical within a couple of hours.

His perception of new British talent? Director Stephen Frears, cameraman Oliver Stapleton and art director Adrian Smith.

John Keane

Composer

John Keane 'struggled' through piano studies at the Guildhall School of Music, acknowledging a greater facility for composing than for performing. When he left, he was uncertain about what to do. Trusting Keane's DIY skills, a friend asked him to make him a cupboard. Six years later, Keane was still earning his living making furniture. Now, however, as a student at the National Film and Television School, he has composed the music for Noella Smith's BAFTA award winning short film *Careless Talk* and Conny Templeman's *Nanou* and is currently working on the score for Harry Hook's first feature, *The Kitchen Toto*.

Although he is interested in film and, obviously, music, composing film scores didn't immediately occur. 'The connection was more, How can I write the kind of music I want to write and experiment in the present-day set-up?' He felt that pop music was too restrictive and was anxious about fitting into the music industry. When his initial application as

Below: John Keane.





Valentine Pelka, Imogen Stubbs, Jean-Philippe Ecoffey in *Nanou*.

a sound and music student at the NFTS was rejected, he spent a year working on film school shoots. This broad knowledge of the elements of film-making he regards as important to the composer, although it is not usual. As soundtracks have become an increasingly lucrative merchandising area, they provide an effective vehicle for smash-hit pop groups rather than for composers who combine a knowledge of both film-making and music.

But doesn't writing film scores present its own limitations? 'There will always be some pieces that work with a film to create a unified whole and there will always be music that fills the gaps like putty.' For Keane, the limitations are essentially to do with people. The importance of a good rapport with the director is something he repeatedly emphasises. Rather than suggesting any director with whom he would like to collaborate, he stresses that the times he has been particularly happy with his work have been when the director has had an open mind to the music.

Keane acknowledges the 'great courage' that producer Simon Perry displayed in trusting Conny Templeman's instincts to work with him when he was so inexperienced. He describes himself as being brought up in the tradition of modern classical music, but is equally confident composing spaghetti Western music for the television programme *Going Bush*. He would like one day to compose for a thriller, but is currently aiming at a wide variety of work. As a contrast with *Nanou*, *The Kitchen Toto* is set in Kenya in the 1950s and is about a black boy who is a victim of the unrest and troubles of the time. Studying sound as well as composition, Keane attributes to pragmatism: 'In this industry, you never know what will happen...'

He regards film school contemporaries Mark Frith, Molly Dineen and Elaine Proctor as interesting new talent, along with Harry Hook.

Stephen Volk

Screenwriter

Screenwriter Stephen Volk's early interest in the supernatural was fuelled by a diet of American horror monster comics and a sneak visit to a Pontypridd cinema at a very formative age to see *King Kong versus Godzilla*. An attempt to unravel the source of this preoccupation was the basis for his script for *Gothic*, directed by Ken Russell and premiered at the London Film Festival. Volk was interested in Roger Corman's films of the 1960s—the claustrophobia of *The Fall of the House of Usher*—and then he found out about the night

that Byron, Shelley and Mary Shelley got together and she conceived *Frankenstein*. 'It seemed that everything we now understand about modern horror sprang from themes they were exploring that night, and I was drawn to explain why they have such longevity.'

'These supernatural themes are still with us. It's perhaps too facile, but you can analyse a lot of them in terms of Freudian psychology. It's almost as though we have always known these things, but until psychology came along there wasn't the language to explain them... The supernatural is the literature of the unconscious. What goes on underneath is much more interesting than what happens on the surface. People in conversation will often say the opposite of what they mean, and that's what should be captured, both visually and in dialogue.'

While writing *Gothic*, Volk worked from nine to five as an advertising copywriter. After an art degree, he completed a post-graduate course in film and television studies at Bristol University in the same year as Alex Cox. Volk opted for copywriting since it provided him with a desk and typewriter. He now admits to spending most of his time 'thinking about something else'—during this period he wrote *Horror Movie*, which was to be directed by Marek Kanievski for Goldcrest before the company's problems, and a screenplay commissioned by Tri-Star as well as *Gothic*. All the same, he won several industry awards for his commercials. Though the psychology of superselling was less compelling, 31-year-old Volk regards it as a useful discipline, and the confidence required in presenting ideas as necessary experience for the film business.

His facility in producing evocative imagery for modern consumer durables denies a sensibility rooted in the past. His favourite films include Visconti's *Death in Venice*, work by Bergman, Polanski's *Macbeth* and Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*—all 'period pieces'. Volk refers to Ken Russell's

Timothy Spall in *Gothic*.





Stephen Volk.

belief that if you set something in the past you are not limited by conventions of fashion. 'Topicality can clutter a film with a contemporary setting. I find it easier to explore more universal themes, working in a sort of limbo; a product of my own imagination. I wouldn't claim that *Gothic* was anything like a documentary film.'

Volk criticises a British tendency to write television scripts for the cinema, but also recognises a 'bigger and more dangerous' tradition. The success of *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Letter to Brezhnev*—highly contemporary, low-budget and made by youthful crews—has proved inspirational for many young people. Not for Volk. Social Realism makes him spit. He describes it as a millstone round the neck of modern British cinema and applauds directors like Alan Parker, Ridley Scott, Derek Jarman and Ken Russell whom he recognises as rejecting it. 'How else do you get people to think about things?' Volk demands.

Volk is tentative about the reaction to *Gothic* and is currently working on a screenplay about the life of Edgar Allan Poe, possibly to be directed by Roger Corman. As with many writers, the appeal of having greater control over the final film encourages him to consider directing. 'I'd rather try and fail than not do it at all.' Also, the production of *Gothic* largely saw off the mystique of The Film Director. 'What struck me most with seeing a real movie set was that it was exactly the same in principle as the films we made in college, but there were more people involved.'

And Volk's idea of significant new British talent? Neil Jordan and, 'though I'm biased,' Alex Cox. 'Too many people say "yes" after a good lunch,' he adds.

Bruce Robinson

Writer and Director

'Writing is a facility for telling a story with black symbols on a white page; with directing you're telling the story with moving images on film.' For Bruce

Robinson, the former is infinitely more difficult. He has written twenty-five screenplays, of which one, *The Killing Fields*, has been produced. Although he is generally appreciative of the film, certain areas of it were different from his original conception, and in an effort to assert greater control over the final product he has written and directed his first feature, *Withnail and I*. His script (originally written as a novel) is semi-autobiographical and set at the end of the 60s. It's a 'comedy of decay' about the relationship between two extremely hard-up characters who share a flat. The 'I' is based on Robinson; Withnail is a melange of some ten different people. Both the main characters are played by unknowns—Robinson perceives a profligacy in British film production which he believes can largely be remedied by savings on casting.

Dismissing any suggestion that he might have felt apprehensive about his first time behind the camera, Robinson says, 'I'm not fearful of the process of directing, rather of not getting the results.' He feels a great sympathy for actors (he began his early career as an actor) and applauds the 'astonishing' ability of the technicians with whom he worked. 'It's easier to tell the story with 65 people to help. Seventy-five per cent of it is worked out for you.'

The auteur idea is anathema to him. Although very keen on directors such as Chaplin and Scorsese, he rails against the director taking artistic credit for what happens on screen. He quotes Hitchcock's adage that if it's correct on the page it will work on screen. For Robinson the script is of prime importance, whatever he thinks of the 'appalling' quality of screenwriting in this country. Does he agree that this is partly attributable to a lack of British

film finance? 'Lots of people given development deals have produced bad stuff. In the 60s and 70s Britain produced third-rate facsimiles of American movies,' he answers. Robinson is optimistic, however, about what he sees as the potential for a strong indigenous British cinema. 'We should have lots to say in a place that's falling to bits. Look at the films produced in Nazi Germany or in Soviet Russia. We should be in a state of rage!' He is angry about Thatcher's government, tabloid newspapers and people's capacity to watch game shows like 'good blue vegetables'. Robinson describes himself as a politically oriented writer, obsessed with propaganda, its spiritual and social manipulation. When asked if there was anything he would like to achieve, he answered simply, 'to stay angry'.

He would like to direct Shakespeare or Dickens (his favourite authors, along with Baudelaire and Henry Miller). Meanwhile, he describes his next feature, which he is again writing and directing and which is financed like *Withnail and I* by HandMade Films, as about 'a plunge into insanity'.



Right: Bruce Robinson.
Below: Paul McGann, Richard E. Grant in *Withnail and I*.



LEFF

Thirty Years After

David Robinson

How different it all was in 1957. The 1986 London Film Festival boasted something over two hundred titles. Then there were fifteen—but what titles! *Throne of Blood*, *A Sunday Romance*, *Le Rideau Cramoisi*, *The House of the Angel*, *Kanal*, *The Seventh Seal*, *Porte des Lilas*, *A Face in the Crowd*, *Le Notti Bianche*, *Aparajito*, *Le Notti di Cabiria*—classics all. Even the few which had to be brought back from the wilderness of history for the NFT's commemorative rerun of the first festival last November—Käutner's *The Captain from Koepenick*, Grigori Chukrai's *The Forty-First*, Kurt Jung-Alsen's *Duped Till Doomsday*, Per Host's lovely documentary *The Laplanders*—still hold their own, thirty years on.

Introducing the first festival in SIGHT AND SOUND, Derek Prouse, its co-inventor with Dilys Powell, proudly pointed out that it included 'three works by new young directors . . . Torre Nilsson's *House of the Angel*, Kurt Jung-Alsen's *Duped Till Doomsday*, Wajda's *Kanal*.' He might have added that Alexandre Astruc's *Le Rideau Cramoisi* and Imre Feher's *A Sunday Romance* were both debut films, while *The Forty-First* and *Aparajito* were only second feature films for Grigori Chukrai and Satyajit Ray. Ten of the fifteen directors were still in their thirties, with Wajda, at 31, the youngest. The three Ks—Käutner, Kurosawa and Kazan—were in their forties. Visconti had just passed fifty. The doyen of the group, René Clair, with a career in pictures going back to 1920, was himself only fifty-nine.

There were giants then . . . but did we know it? Or do we only recognise giants

by their shadow when they have passed? It is hard to recall, but turning up the old volumes of SIGHT AND SOUND I think we did know them for what they were. Already Lindsay Anderson, on the strength of their first films, was hailing Wajda and Ray as artists not like the rest; and Peter John Dyer, reviewing *The Seventh Seal*, decided that Bergman now belonged with 'Buñuel, Mizoguchi, Fellini, and (so far as we know) Wajda—these are among the cinema's visionaries.'

The first London Festival came at a critical moment, just before the watershed between two ages of cinema. Clair was a survivor from the generation that had learned its craft in the silent cinema; *Le Rideau Cramoisi* was a harbinger of the French *nouvelle vague*, which was only a couple of years away, and itself just one facet of a worldwide reassessment of the cinema. Kurosawa, Fellini, Torre Nilsson, Wajda, Bergman, Ray, Visconti, all still new to the international scene in 1957, were to stay pre-eminent in that future cinema. In 1986 three of them—Kurosawa, Fellini and Wajda—are still active; Torre Nilsson and Visconti are dead; Ray and Bergman profess retirement—though as it happens Bergman was the only director from the first London Film Festival to feature in the 1986 event, with his documentary on the making of *Fanny and Alexander*.

Are there comparable giants we ought to be recognising among the film-makers of the 1986 festival? With some 160 features, the task is rather like looking for needles in haystacks, not to speak of the shocking fibs they print in the 100

pages of the programme book to lure us in. It is quite unnerving to find a film you have walked out of elsewhere, in boredom or dudgeon, described as 'delightful . . . hilarious' or 'witty, inventive and quietly truthful'; and someone has the nerve to say that Roman Balayan's turgid *Save Me, My Talisman* 'might have been shot by Godard or Bertolucci with revolutionary language that even Tarkovski, when he worked in Russia, would not have dared to use.'

Tarkovski, of course, does belong among the giants; and *The Sacrifice* is one of the few 1986 films which can unequivocally challenge the 1957 selection. Which other films of 1986 will people still remember, as vividly, another thirty years hence, as they do the 1957 exhibits? Not too many, one might guess (though at the time of writing the three major British films, Bill Douglas' *Comrades*, Nicolas Roeg's *Castaway* and Ken Russell's encounter with the Shelley gang, *Gothic*, remain to be seen). The gentle, lively humanity of Alain Cavalier's story of *Thérèse*, a modest Carmelite who died of tuberculosis in 1897 and was made a saint in 1925, might have some staying power; Reinhard Hauff's careful, critical digest of the Baader-Meinhof trial, *Stammheim*, may survive as a historical document. Bertrand Tavernier's *'Round Midnight*, a portrait of a jazz musician—a composite of Lester Young, Bud Powell and the majestic Dexter Gordon who plays the role, mesmerically—has a kind of classic status, even if the Venice Jury snubbed it. (But then, 1986 saw the ascendancy of mediocrity, with *Out of Africa* edging Kurosawa out of the Oscars, and *The Mission* usurping *The Sacrifice* at Cannes.) Then there was Maria Luisa Bemberg's *Miss Mary*, a major discovery in London as in Venice. This is the 1986 equivalent of *House of the Angel*, the portrait of a monstrous rich Argentine family in the era just before Perón, seen through the eyes of a shrewd and sympathetic English governess (Julie Christie). Representative of the explosion of talent in Argentine cinema since the fall of the Generals (repeating a phenomenon already witnessed in Greece and Spain), this elegant, witty film shows that Bemberg's *Camila* was no flash in the pan.

Perhaps Bemberg will be one of the new giants; though in terms of the men of '57 she has left things rather late. More than sixty, she did not take up film-making until she was a divorcée and multiple grandmother, and decided that the time had come to do something serious with her life. In the grandchild count, she is run close by the Brazilian Suzana Amaral, whose score was already nine when she made her first film *A Hora da Estrela*. The script is shaky in construction, but the observation, humour and kindness of her portrait of a girl from the country, plagued by under-arm odours and a total lack of social grace, trying and failing to make her way in work and love, are out of the ordinary.

Do any of London's other debutants

promise giant growth? Another Argentinian, 32-year-old Carlos Sorín, perhaps, whose inventive *La Película del Rey* was another Venice surprise and an award-winner. The film follows the adventures of a film unit attempting to shoot the story of Orelie Antoine de Tounnens, an obscure lawyer who in 1860 proclaimed himself king of Araucania and Patagonia. The within-the-film director's undertaking develops more and more parallels to the megalomania and the ultimate disaster of Tounnens' own enterprise. Or the two Australian actresses turned directors: Nadia Tass, who displays an expert line in character comedy in *Malcolm*, and Robyn Nevin, with the understanding of

the wayward style of human relationships revealed in *The More Things Change* Another woman, Claire Devers, won the Cannes Caméra d'Or for her first film, *Noir et Blanc*. It is a prurient, dislikeable study of sexual masochism, but full of talent.

Or there is Spike Lee, whose low-budget *She's Gotta Have It* takes a bright new look at sexuality and the readjustment of the sexes, with a portrait of a randy black American woman skilfully juggling a variety of concurrent love affairs. A new generation is coming on too in the flagging Italian cinema. Nanni Moretti, Peter Del Monte and Massimo Mazzucco are not first-time directors (Moretti's *Ecce Bombo* and

Mazzucco's *Summertime* appeared at previous LFFs), but they are developing well. Moretti belongs to the breed of the one-man-band comedian-directors unique to Italy; and *The Mass Is Ended* is an advance in the essential seriousness of its satire on the dilemmas of the church in the contemporary urban world. Del Monte's *Piccoli Fuochi* is brilliantly successful in entering the mind of a five-year-old child, where there is no barrier between reality and fantasy. Mazzucco's *Romance* charts love and war in a reunion between a longestranged father (a tour de force by Walter Chiari) and son.

In 1957 we still expected our Good Films to come from the old-established European industries. Nowadays the focus can alter from year to year. With the French and Italian cinemas in persistent doldrums, African film-making gone very quiet, and Germany never having recovered since the death of Fassbinder and defection of Wenders, interest has currently shifted to Australia, Britain, Argentina, Spain and the Far East.

Mainland China is the current miracle. After *Yellow Earth* in 1985, the 1986 LFF had Jianzhong Huang's *A Girl of Good Family* and Nuanxin Zhang's *Sacrifice of Youth*, both of which treat without condescension or condemnation the lives of remote communities barely touched by modern civilisation; and Xueshu Yan's *Wild Mountains*, a lusty comedy of sexual manners in a far-off rural place.

Set in 1948, *A Girl of Good Family* is the story of a young woman sold in marriage, according to custom, to a six-year-old husband. A curious attachment, neither parental nor marital, grows up between the kindly wife and her bedwetting spouse; and when she falls in love in a normal way with a young man the adultery wounds both partners in the marriage. Comparable qualities of tolerance and humour distinguish *Sacrifice of Youth*, the work of a woman director, which describes the experiences of students sent out to do manual labour in the years of the Cultural Revolution. Arriving in a Dai village in the drab cotton suit which was the Party-approved uniform of those times, the heroine is shocked by the country girls' bright clothes, nude bathing and unabashed flirting with the village boys. In time she relaxes to their earthier ways, and comes to terms of mutual respect with her hosts. Such films as these serve to bring us closer to a remote but very human society, rather as *Aparajito* did in 1957.

History repeats itself. In 1957, Chukrai's *The Forty-First* was remarkable as evidence of the Soviet thaw. There have been a good many frosts since then; but the appearance in the 1986 festival of a number of 'difficult' films from the socialist East witnessed the new liberal atmosphere of the Gorbachev ascendancy. Something of a record for shelf-time is achieved by *The Bitter Truth*, which was completed by the late Zoltán



Above: Julie Christie in *Miss Mary* (Argentina/USA, d. María Luisa Bemberg).

Right: *The Hour of the Star* (Brazil, d. Suzana Amaral).

Below: *A Girl of Good Family* (China, d. Jianzhong Huang).



LFF

Thirty Years After

Várkonyi in 1956, and first saw the light of day in 1986. It is easy to see why this angry story which admits the possibility of corruption and deceit among the lower Party echelons was not thought timely for Hungarian audiences when it was made. The protagonist is an ambitious Party official who hurries a building project without regard for safety, and manages to pass on the blame for the inevitable catastrophe. Várkonyi was a great professional; and this 30-year-old film outclasses anything new in a rather poor year for Hungarian cinema.

The problems of socialist societies are different now. Two new films from Hungary both dealt with the issues raised by the controlled private enterprise allowed by the new economic system. György Szomjas' *The Wall Driller* takes a comic-ironic view of the problems of a young man with a power drill and sexual urges; *Countdown*, directed by Pál Erdöss, is a kindly rather than official warning of the perils in going it alone. Erdöss belongs to the 'neo-documentary' school of Hungarian film-makers: the film affords a vivid sense of a rural community, and successfully mixes professional actors and types.

A Polish film, Wiesław Saniewski's *Custody*, over which officialdom fussed for a couple of years before it won the FIPRESCI prize at Mannheim in 1985, deals, with brutal realism, with conditions in a women's prison between 1967 and 1980. This too seemed to make the eventual trip to London without difficulty.

London was also permitted to show two films that had been problematic for the Soviet authorities. *Farewell*, whose release was held up for some time after it was finished in 1983, was begun by Larissa Shepitko, and completed after her death in a car accident by her husband, Elem Klimov. (Klimov, who in the past had a good many problems with the authorities, notably over *Agonia*, recently took over the influential post of President of the Cinema Workers' Union, in a Gorbachev-spirit reshuffle.) The story, from a book by Valeri Rasputin, is a visually beautiful and very sympathetic study of the reactions of a village doomed to be inundated to make way for a big hydro-electric project. *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* seems to have had slighter problems, though its milieu and subject (from stories by Yuri

German, father of the film's director Alexei German) are the sort that would not have reached the screen at all a year or so ago. The hero is a tough, no-holds-barred NKVD agent in the Stalinist 1930s, carrying on his job of criminal investigation in a city of overcrowding and a flourishing underworld.

It would be curious to make a graph of the thirty London festivals and pinpoint the moment of inflation when the motto seemed to change from The Best of the Festivals to The Most. Almost certainly it occurred quite early in Ken Wlaschin's long period as director of the festival, and it had a lot to do both with the evolution of international festivals and the change in cinema exhibition patterns at home.

In 1957 you could count the number of festivals on one hand. Cannes and Venice were leisurely, glamorous affairs, with days on the beach and evenings passed in watching no more than a couple of dozen films and betting on the prizes. Berlin was still fulfilling its original Cold War function, showing only films from the West, and flaunting its festivities to tease the others over the wall. The Moscow-Karlov Vary event was Eastern Europe's answer, and genuinely international. Apart from that, there was not much else besides the exclusively documentary events at Edinburgh, Krakow and Oberhausen. America had not discovered film festivals. It was easy enough for London to confine the Best of the Rest to 15 films.

Today the number of festivals in itself exceeds the number of films shown at London. Individually the other festivals also grew monstrously. The events and protests of 1968 demanded a place for independent cinema, Third World films and all the other new outgrowths which had bypassed the big festivals. As a result, every festival introduced parallel events like the Berlin Young Film Forum and the Cannes Quinzaine des Réalisateurs. At the same time, festivals were beginning to serve a trade function by hosting commercial film markets. It is impossible to keep tally any more of the number of films shown annually at Cannes (where it is in the thousands) or Berlin. Choice is now indeed an embarrassment; and the London Festival selectors rely upon a worldwide connection of spies and reporters.

Introducing the 1957 festival, Derek Prouse anticipated that 'the public will have a chance to see films whose titles will be mostly familiar to them through the critics' festival reports; exhibitors will be able to study the reaction to unusual films of a British audience; and for the film-makers, there will be an opportunity to make their work more widely known and bring it directly to the attention of the English public.'

Over the years the festival has achieved precisely those ambitions, and has often helped encourage British distributors to take on films. In 1957, of course, there were far fewer distributors and outlets for foreign-language and independent films, though in fact most of

those in the first festival were released in London within the subsequent year or so—the majority by the lamented Academy Cinema. Nowadays, by the time the festival comes to an end as many as fifty films are likely to be scheduled for commercial release or television screenings: often exhibitors try to open their films immediately after the festival. This is gratifying, but it is apparent that the festival would lose its purpose if it did not also show material that cannot be seen anywhere else.

At one level this can mean going rather far out on a limb in the choice of independent films; but there are good films that finally have not sufficient commercial prospects to show any other way: distributors do not jump at East European films any more, for example, and never have favoured documentaries. The London Festival always does its bit for actuality film-making. With unfaltering fidelity it has shown every new episode of Frederick Wiseman's monumental, continuing record of the mores of America; and in 1986 screened his four-part series *Deaf and Blind*. Two very different ethnographical pieces, Robert Gardner's poetic *Forest of Bliss* and Staffan and Ylva Julén's indignant plea for the Inuit, *People at the Navel of the Earth*, seemed to be in direct line of descent from *The Laplanders* in the first festival.

The fifteen films in 1956 came from 13 countries. In 1986, 36 countries are represented; the rise of new national industries in the interim is some explanation of the inflation. In those days you could not have found a film from Australia, Cuba, Indonesia, Ireland, Mali or Tunisia; and tastes were much too snobby to look for anything in Hong Kong or the other popular cinemas of the East. An even more significant change in programme balance, however, is the massive and still growing bulk of English-language films—in 1986 there were 31 American titles, 54 British (shorts included), 11 Australian, 4 from Ireland and one each from New Zealand and Canada, making up almost exactly half the total programme.

In the first festival there was only one film from America, *A Face in the Crowd*, which was almost certainly only made available because its distributors had despaired of its chances at the box office. At that time if the major distributors decided, rightly or wrongly, that a film was totally devoid of commercial prospects, they deduced it must be art, and so fit only for the last resort, a festival. On no account would they risk tainting a healthy film by consigning it to a festival and the contagions of art. Circumstances or opinions have changed; and the American distributors seem all too eager to get their pictures into festivals.

For their part, the London programme planners seem never to have recovered either from their emotion at being accepted by the industry, or from the 70s vogue for creating cults round exploitation pictures. The inclusion of *Ghostbusters* in the 1985 Festival invited a serious review of policy about



Above: *The Bitter Truth*
(Hungary, d. Zoltán Várkonyi).



Left: *A Kind of English*
(UK, d. Ruhul Amin).



Right: *The Inuit*
(Sweden/Greenland/Denmark,
d. Staffan Julén, Ylva Julén).

Below: *Farewell*
(USSR, d. Elem Klimov).



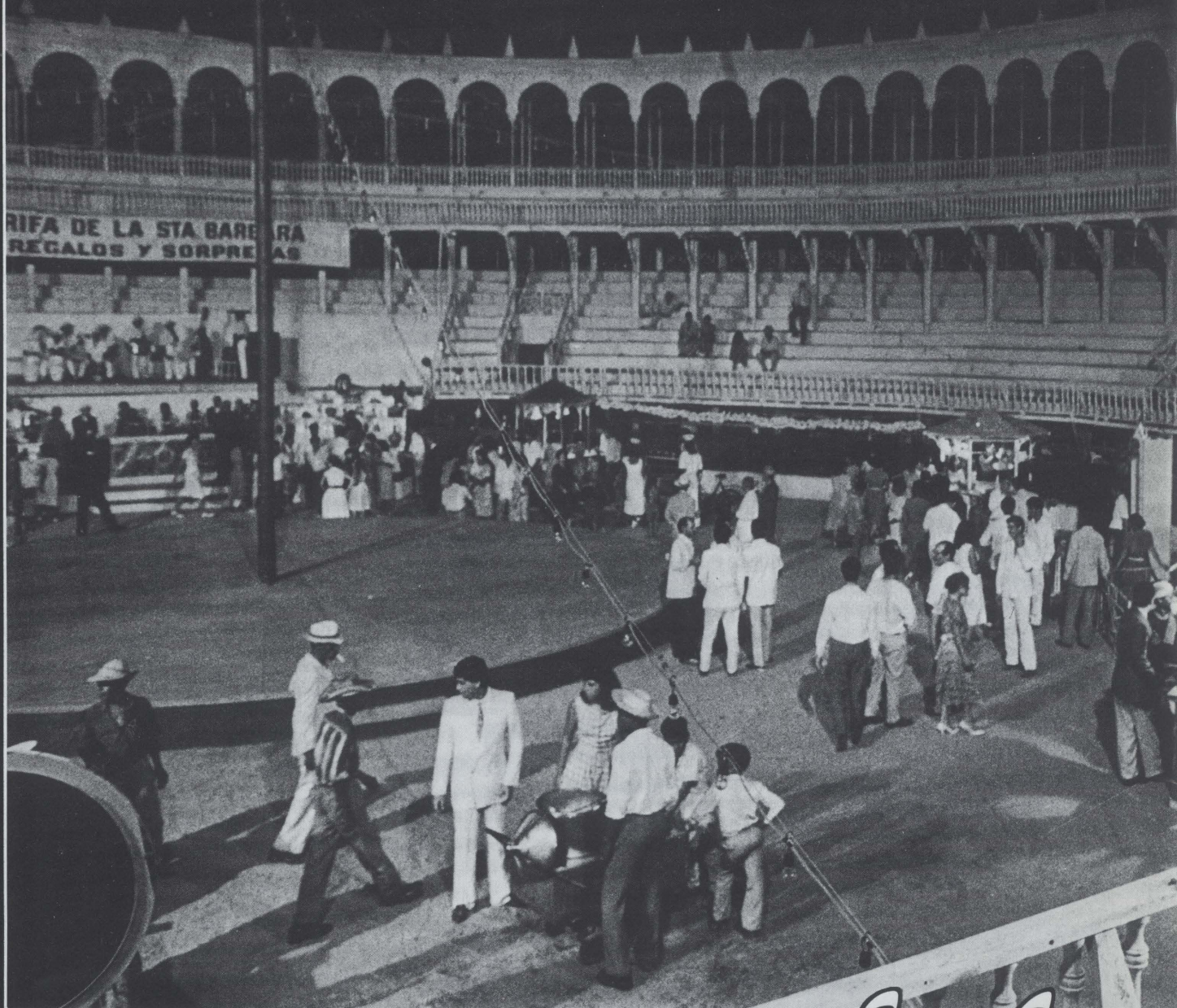
American films which are destined to normal commercial release and have no truly exceptional qualities of content or technique to merit what should still be the distinction of a festival showing. Does *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* deserve the honour just because it is a slightly brighter than average brat-pack picture; or *The Fly* because it is a slightly nastier shade of horror? Maybe the argument is simply that they are audience-pleasers—these particular shows were in the Empire and Odeon. A girl has to live, and so perhaps a festival.

In the early days the problem with British films was different. Every year there was the same desperate scratching around to find something—anything—just so that the British film was represented. The problem now is the complaints about the films they turn away, and they still end up with fifty-four. Not to be too brutal, the British selection nowadays flaunts quantity rather than quality; but it is hard to argue against the presence of a better class of made-for-TV pieces which would otherwise have no chance of a showing on the big screen, or broader critical attention than a one-night stand on the little screen can attract.

What is exemplary about the British display however—especially when it is compared with British films in 1957—is the capacity for protest, for anger, for tackling the great affairs of our time. Karl Francis' *Boy Soldier* is a scathing view of the situation of white national minorities in the British Isles; and several films dealt with race—Horace Ové's *Playing Away* with humour, Ruhul Amin's *A Kind of English* with compassion, Steve Dwoskin's *Ballet Black* with a perhaps somewhat romanticised view of the pioneering role of Berto Pasuka's Ballets Nègres.

Overall, this may be the most striking difference between the cinema that was on show in the first festival, and the great mess of 1986. The old films may have been better; but taken as a whole, the new ones seem more engaged. A third of the 1957 films were essentially literary in orientation; another third dealt with history, recent or remote. Only *A Face in the Crowd* seemed to wrestle with any urgency with issues of the day. The striking thing about the 1986 programme is that there have never been so few films about the past. Even the Second World War and the Holocaust are very little in evidence. Some of the new films of course—like *Critters*, *The Fly*, *Vamp*, *Ferris Bueller* and *3 Hommes et un Couffin*—are about nothing at all. But a large proportion of the 200 films, good, bad and awful, do try honestly to come to terms with the world, to examine how people of today live and think and feel—whether it is John Badham's science fiction morality *Short Circuit*, or Yoshishige Yoshida's study of the tragedies of age, *Promise*, or Jaime Humberto Hermosillo's wise and wicked reflection on sexual accommodation, *Doña Herlinda and Her Son*. In its own way, the cinema of 1986 is engaged. ■

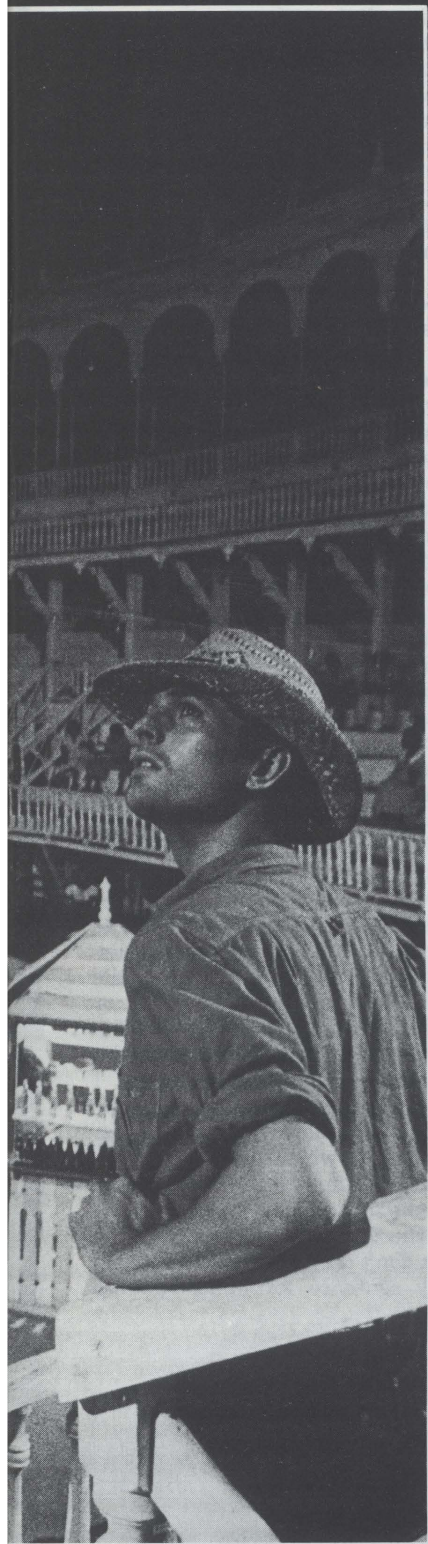
The bullring at Cartagena: Rupert Everett.



Michel Ciment

Chronicle of a Film Foretold

Photos: Mario Tursi / Sygma



Some film-makers thrive on challenges, as though difficulties of all kinds stimulated their creative impulses. Such is Francesco Rosi. Why else would a 64-year-old director with his record of festival honours, of critical and commercial successes, decide to shoot for seventeen weeks in Colombia, six days a week, under the tropical sun, with an average temperature of 35 to 40° centigrade, 70 per cent humidity and in an environment threatening enough for the producers to give each actor a body-guard?

Rosi had other good reasons for shooting his adaptation of Gabriel García Márquez' *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* in the country where the action takes place. Ever since 1948, when he was an assistant to Luchino Visconti on *La Terra Trema*, shot in Sicily among the fishermen of Aci Trezza, Rosi has remained faithful to the lesson of the master: to go through the ordeal of a contact with reality to test the authenticity of people and places. His recent films may have shown a tendency towards greater stylisation, but this principle from the early days of neo-realism has never been forgotten. It led him to film his recent *Carmen* in the heart of Andalusia, in Ronda and Carmona, in spite of all the problems involved in shooting an opera on location.

Although Rosi's reputation rests on his investigations of Italian postwar political life, he is no stranger to Spanish and South American culture. He speaks fluent Spanish and likes to remind you that his native city, Naples, was dominated by the Spaniards over three centuries; he directed arguably the best film about bullfighting in *The Moment of Truth* (1965), spent six months in Bolivia at the end of the 1960s preparing a project on Che Guevara, and captured the raw flavour of southern Spain in *Carmen*. And there is a strong affinity between his world and the novels of García Márquez. So many of his books centre on death that they could not but attract a director whose own films (including the most famous, *Salvatore Giuliano*) have so often conducted an enquiry into a tragic death, its causes and consequences.

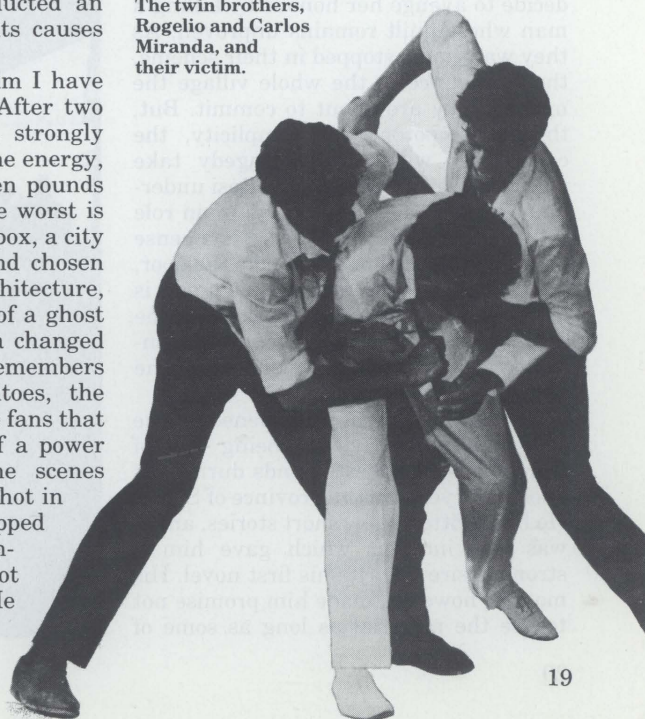
'This is the most difficult film I have ever directed,' Rosi tells me. After two months of shooting, this tall, strongly built man still displays the same energy, though he has lost some fifteen pounds in weight. Physically, now, the worst is behind him: six weeks in Mompox, a city some two hundred miles inland chosen for its old Spanish colonial architecture, which has become something of a ghost town since the Rio Magdalena changed its course. The whole crew remembers the nights with the mosquitoes, the absence of air conditioning, the fans that stopped ventilating because of a power shortage. At one point some scenes from *The Mission* were to be shot in Mompox but the plan was dropped because of the impossible conditions. Rosi, however, could not forsake the idea of Mompox. He wanted it at any cost, 'For its

aristocratic flavour, for the physical impression of a dead country cut off from the development of civilisation.' So the only small hotel in the town, old and decrepit, was refurbished, some of the cast put up in private houses, and he asked for a French cook to come from Bogotá. One night the cook, Clément, almost killed himself riding his motor-bike, was robbed of his belongings and landed up in hospital. The make-up man, Giuliano Laurenti, died of a heart attack. A guard who kept watch on the set was riddled with nine bullets. And one day four hundred extras went on strike, demanding double wages, while the municipal council held a sudden meeting and decided to impose a heavy toll on any company truck parking in the streets.

Now Rosi and his hundred-strong crew are in Cartagena-de-Indias, the Pearl of the Caribbean, a city 450 years old from which the wealth of the new world—gold, silver and emeralds—went to Spain and which was the prey of the English and Dutch pirates. The local people have found work on one of the biggest European productions ever made, costing \$8m and financed by two Swiss backers, Yves Gasser and Francis von Büren, with the help of Italian television, the French and Colombian governments and distribution deals all over the world.

In a whitewashed church, ascetic looking but with an altarpiece glittering with gold, Rosi directs the twins Rogelio and Carlos Miranda, who come at once to confess their crime to the priest and claim their innocence. The two brothers are Canadian, models working in fashion photography who have never before acted in a film. 'Don't overdo it,' Rosi tells them. 'You are already showing your strength and sweating. It's enough.' He speaks to them in English. He talks French to Pierre Gamet, the sound engineer (Rosi is one of the few Italian directors who uses direct sound whenever he can), Italian to cinematographer Pasqualino De Santis, Spanish to the

The twin brothers, Rogelio and Carlos Miranda, and their victim.



local architect who is playing the priest.

This cosmopolitan atmosphere pleases Rosi. It reflects, after all, the motley cultures of the Caribbean. A similar mixture is found in the casting, with that juxtaposition of amateurs and professionals which Rosi has always enjoyed. Before anything else, he insists, he must find someone whose appearance corresponds to his idea of the character: other considerations are secondary. So Bill Moore, a north American who teaches scuba diving in Cartagena, is playing a republican general, the manager of the hotel where the crew is staying is the father of a family, and Divo, the owner of an Italian restaurant (the best pasta in Cartagena), plays the village photographer. Divo came to Colombia when Pontecorvo was shooting *Burn!* and has remained here ever since; before that, he worked as a stills photographer for Visconti, Fellini, Germi and Bertolucci. Rosi has also brought with him an old friend, tv and theatre director Silverio Blasi, to play the mayor of the village. The young people are played by some famous names: Anthony Delon, as handsome as his father; Caroline Lang, daughter of the former French Minister of Culture; Lina Botero, as slim as her father's models are obese; and Rosi's own daughter Carolina.

Alongside these non-professionals or near beginners, Rosi has assembled a star-studded international cast: Ornella Muti, Rupert Everett, Lucia Bose, Gian Maria Volonte, Irene Papas, Alain Cuny. There are some forty characters in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, which like many of Rosi's films takes the form of an investigation. A doctor (Gian Maria Volonte) comes back to his birthplace after twenty years to try to understand an atrocious crime to which he was a witness. Seduced by a beautiful stranger (Rupert Everett), who had offered to marry her, the young bride (Ornella Muti) is sent back to her mother (Irene Papas) on her wedding night when her husband discovers that she is not a virgin. She denounces a young man (Anthony Delon) and her twin brothers decide to avenge her honour by killing a man whose guilt remains unproven. As they want to be stopped in their scheme, they announce to the whole village the murder they are about to commit. But, through impotence or complicity, the community will let the tragedy take place. 'Tragedy but not fate,' Rosi underlines. 'Destiny does not play a main role in this story. Of course, there is a sense of doom when the mother locks the door, unaware that outside it her own son is going to be stabbed to death. But the emphasis is more on collective responsibility, on the lack of rationality in the decisions people make.'

This killing actually happened in the early 1950s, the victim being one of García Márquez' best friends during his adolescent years in the province of Sucre. He had written a few short stories, and it was this incident which gave him a strong desire to write his first novel. His mother, however, made him promise not to use the material as long as some of

those involved were still alive. Even today, Madame Márquez has not opened the book—the characters are too close to her—and although she lives in Cartagena has refused to visit the set. Thirty years after the event, with the disappearance of the last witnesses, García Márquez was able to write his novel. He rented a room in the very *pension* where the young stranger had stayed and there, over fourteen weeks, he wrote the book which made him a Nobel Prize winner and sold a million copies in his native country alone within weeks of its publication in 1981.

Rosi never spoke to García Márquez about the way he wanted to adapt the book with Tonino Guerra. 'We are close friends and we have a mutual esteem. But, like all writers who know about cinema, he is well aware that a film is autonomous in relation to a literary work. He said to me very clearly, "The book is mine, the film is yours".' But García Márquez should not be too worried. Rosi has adapted the First World War recollections of Emilio Lussu, *Un Anno sull' Altipiano* (*Uomini Contro*), Carlo Levi's autobiographical story *Christ Stopped at Eboli* and Leonardo Sciascia's metaphysical thriller *Il Contesto* (*Illustrious Corpses*) and in each case has managed to achieve a fine balance: respecting the original work and yet imposing his own unquestionably personal stamp. Whether he begins with a book or with actual events (*Hands Over the City*, *The Mattei Affair*, *Salvatore Giuliano*), Rosi goes to the place, immerses himself in the reality of the country, and then transfigures it. 'This is Márquez' most literary achievement,' he says. 'In this book, the characters hardly ever speak, which helps to create a more visual film but makes it difficult to explore individual psychology. I ought to add that Márquez has a strong relationship with reality. People talk about the magic in his work, but it has nothing to do with fantasy, with pure

imagination. It is rather a question of the poetic transposition of the surrounding reality.'

And this is what Rosi does, if need be in a literal way. As the square in Mompox wasn't wide enough to stage the murder, Rosi had his set designer Andrea Crisanti build the same square on a larger scale twenty miles from Cartagena, with the help of 150 workmen and at a cost of £250,000. In fact, it had to be built twice: the Pope's visit, and his speech on the very spot where they had decided to shoot, forced them to dismantle the first construction and begin again elsewhere. We watch the craftsmen finishing the sets after five months work: the facade of the church, the presbytery, the dairy, the small hotel where the stranger has rented a room, the house of the victim. But if you push the wooden doors open there is nothing behind but riverside swamps, pelicans and wild pigs. This square is the heart of the drama in which a young man will be immolated at dawn with the silent approval of his fellow citizens. An extreme example of the violence characteristic of a society governed by machismo and matriarchy.

'Over the years,' Rosi says, 'any director expresses themes that you can find in all his work. In my case: violence as the result of a certain cultural context. It is a commentary not only on death—and therefore on love and life—but also on the southern culture. The townspeople let the appointed victim die without knowing if he is innocent or guilty. They do this in the name of a moral cowardice which is justified by the myth of an honour to be protected. I believe the film is a statement not only against physical violence but also the violence of ideas which have no ethical basis. There is a terrible line in both the book and the film, spoken by the fiancée of one of the twins: "I will never marry you if you don't do your duty as a man." It's a key sentence for understanding



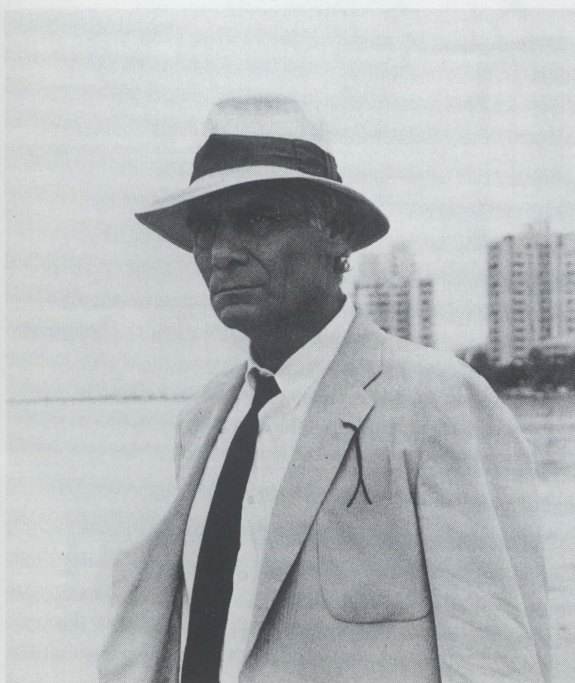
this violence and the myth of honour.'

Rosi displays the same concentration in analysing his film as in directing it, down to the smallest detail. On the set, he is a show in himself and delights his actors. 'I love the way he explains my role to me,' says Ornella Muti. 'When he wants you to achieve something, he first tries to find it deep within himself. He was an actor in his youth, and when he mimes a scene for you, shows you gestures and intonations, he almost takes the shape of the man, the woman or the child . . .' Anthony Delon is struck by the precision of his advice: 'In crowd scenes, some directors concern themselves only with the two main characters. Not so with Rosi. What's stunning is his power of attention and concentration on what is going on around, from the movement of a horse to a badly worn cassock or the gesture of a man taking off his hat. Everything is controlled to an inch.'

In Cartagena's bullring—the oldest in Latin America, superb with its white-washed wood—Rosi shows his command on the set, the way he takes possession of the space where he's shooting and marshals the energies of his cast and crew. He has loved the Plazas de Toros since he directed Miguel Miguelin in *The Moment of Truth*, and one remembers how he ended *Carmen* brilliantly with a double death in the afternoon. Here he is shooting at night and has transformed the arena into a fairground, the lottery of Santa Barbara, full of *regalos y sorpresas* (gifts and surprises), where Ornella Muti runs a stall. The handsome stranger (Rupert Everett) is to court her by buying all the lottery tickets to be sure of winning the gramophone which he will later offer to her. For a while Rosi leaves the eye of the camera—he pays constant attention to the frame and discusses lighting problems all the time with Pasqualino De Santis, his colleague for twenty years. He gives orders to the hundreds of extras



Right: Francesco Rosi.
Below, left to right: Rupert Everett;
the doctor, Gian Maria Volonte;
Irene Papas and Ornella Muti.



through a megaphone, then moves over to the tropical orchestra which is going to give the Colombians what they love best: an opportunity to dance. He asks Rupert Everett to walk round the steps of the stand and come nearer to his beloved, while the electric garlands suddenly light up the fiesta.

Rosi is a master of these elaborate crowd scenes, from the soldiers in the trenches of *Uomini Contro* to the May-day celebration in the valley of *Salvatore Giuliano*, from Mattei's public speeches to the street riots of *Hands Over the City*. Today, however, he finds that they raise fewer problems than they did earlier in his career, puzzle and stimulate him less than an encounter between two characters. A confrontation between people: that is what he now enjoys directing above anything else. Next afternoon a sombre Irene Papas, dressed in black, walks down the shaky steps behind the bullring and yells angrily at her daughter, 'Where are you going?' Muti, more beautiful than ever in her tight green dress, answers back furiously: 'I don't love this man. I don't want to marry him. Such an important decision can't be taken without love.' Papas, the incarnation of all Mediterranean mothers, casts a cold eye, holds her by the arm, and tells her peremptorily, 'Love also can be learnt.'

In contrast with the noisy violence of this encounter is the quiet but no less tense meeting between Rupert Everett and the widower (Alain Cuny) from whom he wants to buy a house and who refuses because it shelters the memories of his dead wife. The setting is a patrician mansion, with its eight columns, its marble pavement, fountain in porphyry and carved wood furniture. The young man whispers his financial offers while playing dominoes, lays piles of bank-notes on the table, leaves for a moment and comes back with still more money. Cuny, now 77 and more monumental

Ornella Muti.
Below, left to right:
the brothers and the priest;
Rupert Everett and Alain Cuny;
the killing in the square.



than ever, finally yields. Tears pour down his stone face; it is all done in one take. The crew applauds spontaneously and Rosi jumps from behind the camera to clasp the old actor in his arms. They have been friends for years (back in 1952 they were both assistants to Michelangelo Antonioni on *I Vinti*) and Cuny has played in several of Rosi's films. This time, Rosi has persuaded him to fly over from Paris for two days shooting, one scene and six lines of dialogue. He is rewarded by this intensely emotional shot. 'What strikes me about Rosi,' Alain Cuny says, 'is that he is systematically attentive to other people. I remember that I was surprised and also fascinated by the words he often used at the time I first knew him. *Di me* (tell me). It was playful and serious at the same time, like a leisurely conversation.'

Rupert Everett is conscious of the new experience this film represents in his career after *Another Country* and *Dance with a Stranger*. He sees himself as a traveller, an outsider looking on at the society of the town; there is a certain mystery about him, and he is quite different from the other characters, though he is essentially a Latin American with a machismo upbringing. 'I am myself a Roman Catholic and was educated in a monastery, which helps me to understand the environment,' Everett has rented the most beautiful house in Cartagena and has bought a small monkey which never leaves his head. He realises that this is not an actor's film, that he is a piece in Rosi's jigsaw.

In Santa Teresa Street, Rosi shoots the lovers' first encounter. Today he is wearing a buccaneer's headband, a change from the panoply of elegant straw hats which still cannot prevent his heavy sweating. Muti is on the wooden balcony of a white house carrying two birdcages. She sees Everett in the street below; he

observes her with the conviction that she will be his. Like many of the scenes in the film, this one is silent and highly charged. Everett is dressed in sombre clothes. For the costume designer, Enrico Sabbatini, they express the mystery of a character who, in a sense, represents destiny. The victim, Santiago Nasar, young and beautiful, loved by everybody, will wear white. 'As for Muti's clothes, I wanted them to be lovely but not gaudy, to reflect the fragility and modesty of her character. Rosi trusts me but he has his own point of view. He's a very elegant man himself and his wife owns a fashion shop near the Piazza di Spagna. He pays great attention to each costume.'

This concern for every detail is the more remarkable in that Rosi feels the pressure of time, with the film's heavy schedule and almost daily change of sets. In a sense, his struggle against time finds its parallel in the story itself, a man going inexorably towards his death. In García Márquez' novels, time is always destructive. 'Because,' comments Rosi, 'it is the time of memory. There is no hope because the events have already happened and have their fixed place in the past. Only the present can be a time of hope.' As the years pass, Rosi's films have become more metaphysical. He has not given up his social and political concerns, but in the films since *Illustrious Corpses*, when he has been looking at southern culture, a more lyrical approach to reality has been linked to a keen sense of philosophical questioning.

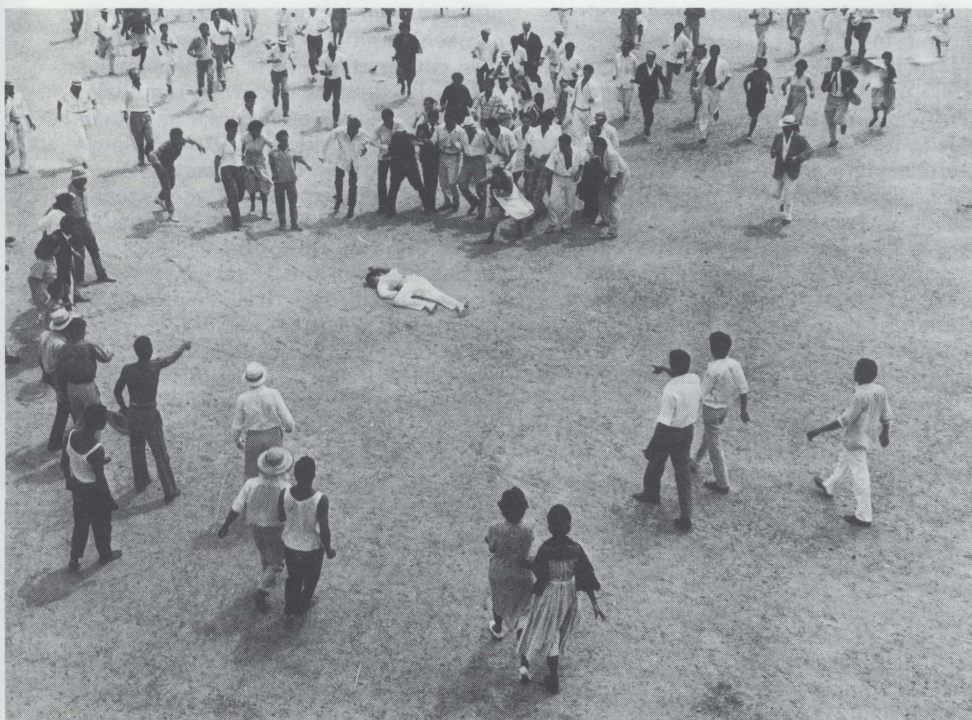
This may explain why he did not choose to shoot in summer, which would have spared him some weather problems. But by temperament he prefers nuances and has opted for a winter shoot (May to October, in the southern hemisphere), with cloudy skies and the constant passage from rain to sun. Rosi avoids aggressive colours and prefers shades closer to the black and white spectrum—

more mysterious, more suggestive, allowing more easily for a transfiguration of reality. To shoot these horizontal landscapes and architecture of the coastal region, he and De Santis have decided to use a super-techniscope, which can lead later to different formats: 1.33, 1.66 for television, etc.

Pasqualino De Santis has worked with Bresson, Losey and Visconti, and on ten films with Rosi, who gave him his first big chance by promoting him from camera operator (with the great Di Venanzo) to cinematographer on *The Moment of Truth*. In many ways De Santis is a star of the movie, staying in the hotel's presidential suite, earning a royal salary and surrounded by his assistants. A small, silent, discreet man, De Santis lives in total osmosis with his director. 'Rosi accepts all the new techniques. He is always ready to experiment and allows his collaborators real freedom of expression. On this film, there have been a great variety of lighting problems. The sequence of Gian Maria Volonté's return was shot in grey and foggy tones. The arrival of the bishop on the paddle-boat at dawn has all the typical Colombian colours between red and yellow, while for Rupert's entrance to the arena, which takes place at twilight, I tried to capture the bluish atmosphere of this magic moment. But of course to achieve this you need the flexibility that Rosi is able to offer you.'

Rosi allows himself the freedom to improvise. 'I think that a director like myself, who is also co-writer of all his scripts, should go on adjusting the scenes as he shoots. I take advantage of what the place offers me. There was a scene, for instance, in which Rupert Everett and Ornella Muti were walking beside a stream and she was telling him what house she would like to live in. As I was rehearsing, I noticed a reach of the river where there were all kinds of birds. They flew out of the trees and away low across the water as we rowed past. It suddenly seemed more rewarding that the lovers should be in a boat and should speak amid a flurry of birds. I respect the script but I invent whenever possible. I think it's characteristic of the Italian school of film-making. Our scripts are not defined to the last detail, as with Hollywood films: we keep a margin for improvisation. If everything were down on paper, I would probably no longer have the desire to shoot.'

It is this mixture of rigour and invention which characterises Rosi at work. A beautifully crafted script, and yet nights spent during the filming to add a line or a gesture. A motley cast, with its meeting of international stars and Colombian faces chosen in the street. A most serious director, nicknamed 'Il Professore', who after fourteen hours of work still has the energy, enthusiasm and hunger to explain to a restaurant proprietor, and with all the necessary gestures, how best to prepare the spaghetti with oil, garlic, pimentos and tomatoes. A mixture of the professional and the 'amateur', of that craft and passion which gives the film life. ■



Today's

Alan Stanbrook

● Unless we devoted resources to the field, we would not have had a news service. It was a difficult military manoeuvre ●



Immediate news: the Space Shuttle.



News delayed: the Vietnam War.

March 8 marks the thirtieth anniversary of one of the most influential companies in the field of communications, with an ability to colour the thinking of more than half a billion people worldwide. Yet its name is scarcely known outside the media of television and journalism. Visnews, the world's largest supplier of international television news pictures, is the company that stands behind much of what is shown on BBC news. It also maintains a far-flung overseas service that beams pictures by satellite to more than 400 broadcasting organisations in 85 countries, including the communist bloc. Some 470 million television sets are thought to receive Visnews pictures every day.

Nowadays, Visnews is a 55%-owned subsidiary of Reuters, but it did not begin that way. As British Commonwealth International Newsfilm Agency, it was set up in 1957 as a four-way venture. The BBC and the Rank Organisation each held 37½% of the capital and the rest was equally divided between the Australian and Canadian Broadcasting Corporations. Later these were joined by New Zealand television.

Reuters became a minority shareholder in 1960 and a major one eight years later, when Rank pulled out. In 1985, with the mutual agreement of all shareholders, as required by the trust deed, Reuters took formal control by purchasing a chunk of the BBC's shares for £2.6m, a figure that put a price tag of about £12m on the whole company. Today, the BBC and the three Commonwealth broadcasting corporations all have 11¼% of the capital. For Reuters, the acquisition of a controlling stake in Visnews provided the third leg of a media triangle, complementing and offering clear scope for synergy with Reuters' traditional wire and picture services.

Visnews is a huge international operation resting on a surprisingly small base. Its headquarters at Park Royal, to which it moved in 1975, is headily surrounded by a variety of brewing and distilling interests (Guinness is a near neighbour). The premises are trim, modernish and comfortable, but also unostentatious—not at all what one would expect from a company whose

crusading camerawork first alerted the world to the famine in Ethiopia.

The group is profitable, but not a big money-maker. Indeed, sometimes it has made a loss. It employs 392 people, whom it pays £6.4m a year. Even the highest-paid director is not grandly rewarded at £47,000 (at the last official count, though he may get more now). Group sales in the year to 31 March 1985 (the most recent on file at Companies House at the time this article was written) just topped £21m, on which a profit of £754,000 was earned before tax. Profit margins are a tightish 3.6%, but at least there is a margin. In the previous year, thanks to a slower than expected increase in the traffic via Visnews' satellite communication system, there had been a loss of £334,000 on turnover of £18.4m.

As part of the new dispensation, Reuters has put its own man at the helm, Julian Kerr. In the eighteen years he has worked for Reuters, he has had wide international experience in South Africa, Scandinavia and other parts of Europe. But Visnews is not an easy command. 'Burnout' is a hazard that has afflicted more than one previous incumbent, and it was in order to avoid this, rather than out of any misgivings about the Reuters takeover, that Brian Quinn (Mr Kerr's predecessor as managing director) decided to leave Visnews after five years in the hot seat.

To get a perspective on Visnews today, it is useful to look back a little to the late 1970s. At that time, the business had run out of steam and was in dire financial straits. During one three-month period at the turn of the decade, Visnews was losing money at the rate of £2m a year. Immediate and drastic action had to be taken to stop the rot. The record 1984-85 profit of £754,000 was the culmination of what Brian Quinn did in the intervening years to repair the damage.

Visnews was in trouble because it had lost its way. More than one outside observer, thinking back to those days, has identified the source of the trouble as a kind of BBC syndrome. Though not wholly owned by the BBC, the company had become a stodgy, bureaucratic clone of that organisation. It was complacent, lethargic and had lost its drive.

News Today

on thirty years of Visnews

As Brian Quinn tells it, his first two years had to be spent limiting the damage. Staff had to be laid off, the rundown overseas bureaus had to be revived, morale restored. 'Unless we devoted resources to the field,' Mr Quinn says, 'we would not have had a news service. It was a difficult military manoeuvre.' A lot of money was poured into the New York office, where Visnews had been mouldering for four years with a staff of four in part of the NBC building. As part of the facelift, Visnews moved house to new premises opposite St Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue; the latest equipment was installed and the staff was quadrupled. As a result, Visnews personnel became motivated again to go out and get news stories instead of relying on what they could fillet from the NBC network.

Visnews' difficulties in the late 1970s also stemmed partly from its capital structure. It was something like a co-op, suspended midway between a public and a private company. (Indeed, the trust deed, which eventually had to be amended to permit the Reuters takeover, expressly forbade a single company to own it.) A limiting factor had been Visnews' inability to tap the cash resources of a corporate parent. As a result, the company was in bad shape and visibly suffering from too little investment. None of the shareholders was inclined to come to the rescue of a company that it did not fully control; the board was made up of non-executive directors, all of whom were jittery in the face of serious losses. Brian Quinn had a good personal relationship with the board, but had to rely on his own City connections to drum up the cash he needed (he had formerly been a consultant to a merchant bank and had undertaken company doctoring services for a number of other banks).

Visnews' financial problems were at the time in marked contrast to the fortunes of the company's principal competitor, Worldwide Television News. WTN (formerly UPTN) is a kind of mirror image of Visnews. In Britain, because of its ownership pattern, it supplies a similar service to Visnews but for the independent channels (ITN owns 47½% of WTN, ABC in New York 42½% and

Australia's Channel 9, controlled by Kerry Packer, the remaining 10%). In Britain, then, Visnews and WTN politely serve different markets; overseas they compete head on. Contracts with foreign broadcasting services are won by the company that can deliver the best service fastest.

In the late 1970s, WTN was winning quite a number of the races. Money was available from Kerry Packer's outfit and WTN was therefore often better equipped than the Visnews teams. For Visnews, WTN was starting to look like a dangerous rival. 'They had us rattled for a while,' says Brian Quinn. One of the steps he took to combat this was to beef up the technology in the field. When he took over, the group had only one up-to-the-minute video camera capable of shooting material ready for almost instant editing and transmission back to London; when he left, it had 35. This speeded up the whole nature of the operation. Hitherto, when news stories had been shot on film, there was inevitably a lengthy delay while the negatives were developed and edited.

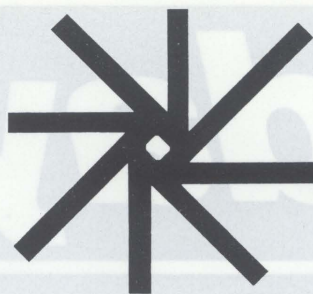
Thanks to the progressive switchover to shooting on faster video cameras, Visnews was increasingly able to get major stories on to television screens within 24 hours of the event. Worldwide viewers saw pictures of Sanjay Gandhi's fatal plane crash while smoke was still rising from the wreckage. Also in India, Visnews got the first pictures out of Bhopal thanks to the ingenuity of a local bureau chief, who nipped in by train while others were waiting for a flight. He got his shots at first light and was winging them out of the country while rivals were still clearing customs on the way in.

One of Visnews' major triumphs, but one about which it is prone to blow its own trumpet, was the scoop presented on the BBC's 9 o'clock news showing pictures of the famine in Ethiopia. They were shot by the Visnews cameraman Mohamed Amin, who was later and deservedly acclaimed for his achievement. He is Visnews' African bureau chief, a Kenyan with an outstanding news sense and a reputation for obtaining world exclusives (he was the first to interview Uganda's Idi Amin after he

had been deposed). That the west saw the harrowing pictures from Ethiopia was largely due to Mohamed Amin's persistence in persuading the authorities to allow him to photograph the worst hit areas. All credit to him, but Visnews' justified pride should not blind us to the fact that it has no monopoly on televisual scoops. The first pictures of the assassination of Sadat came from WTN, as did those of the attempted murder of the Pope.

As Kevin Hamilton, Visnews' managing editor, says, one of the principal differences between the company now and the company as it was even five years ago is that there is a new commitment to providing today's news today. It is often forgotten how recent a phenomenon this is in television. Coverage of the Vietnam war, which daily fed American television screens with the impression of instant actuality, was in fact reaching audiences several days late. The film had to be flown to Tokyo for developing, wait for a flight to Sydney and perhaps reach Australian screens five or six days after the incidents it was depicting. Now, thanks to video and satellites, it can be on the air within ninety minutes. The giveaway phrase, for anybody who looks at old newsreels, is 'We have now received first pictures of...' That generally meant something you had read about in your newspaper earlier that week. Nowadays, satellite transmission is so familiar that nobody bothers to mention how the pictures reached you. 'Live by satellite' has itself become an antique slogan.

The change in the nature of news transmission is reflected in alterations over the years to the company's articles of association. The old British Commonwealth International Newsfilm Agency formally changed its name to Visnews in 1964 (Visnews was originally just a telegraphic address). The initial 'objects' of the enterprise related to the supply of news on film 'or any other means' and to the production of films. The production division, which latterly did documentary work for Channel 4, was closed down in 1983-84 as it was making too small a contribution and was by that time out of keeping with the rest of the business. Clauses referring to film production



have now been deleted from the articles of association.

Now the two principal aims are these:

(1) To establish, carry on and supply a service of world news by any means within the field of audio-visual communications and to issue, publish, circulate and otherwise turn to account the same and in particular to supply the same to subscribers throughout the world. In the carrying out of its objects under this sub-head, the company shall at all times ensure that the services rendered by it are politically independent and free from bias.

(2) To carry on any business within the field of audio-visual communications and any other activity or business relating thereto.



How does Visnews go about fulfilling these requirements? Let's look first at the way the company is organised. It consists essentially of eight or nine separate divisions, the most important of which is concerned with the provision of news stories. Subscribers to Visnews have access every day to about fifty stories selected from around the world. Of these, roughly thirty are chosen for the daily transmissions to broadcasters by satellite and landline and for inclusion in a special, pre-packaged video cassette service, which is flown to customers by aeroplane. However the story is sent, it is edited down to roughly 90 taut seconds in length and is accompanied by shot lists and a commentary.

Camera crews on every continent gather the information and forward it to London by satellite for editing and daily syndication. Whether an individual story makes it to syndication depends on the answer to a simple question applied to all hard news stories: 'If this happened in Peru, would audiences be interested in seeing it?' How many of the stories are used is the client's responsibility. It is also impossible to control the way in which a story may be used overseas. The material, for instance, can be re-edited and the accompanying text rewritten to supply a bias absent from the original commentary. Coverage arrangements exist with Russia, Eastern European broadcasters and Peking television, but the stories used by these clients are highly likely to have passed through some form of political filter en route to domestic television.

From time to time there is also a demand for 'soft' news stories—humorous or sentimental items to send viewers to bed with a smile. Visnews supplies these, too, along with pictures of international sporting events, but the

new technology has hardened up news everywhere. If the world were still living in the age of air-freighted 16mm film, there is no doubt that nightly news bulletins would still be full of pandas in zoos and cross-legged camels crossing the Alps. The staler the news, the jollier it needs to be. But this, of course, also encourages a tendency to superficiality; that is why old cinema newsreels, which often presented facts that were at least seven days out of date, now look eccentrically trivial.

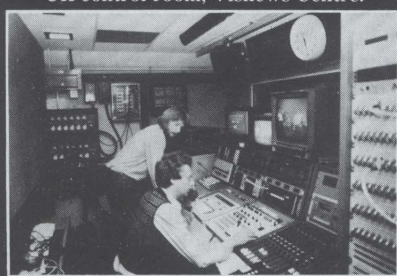
Much of this 'coffee-table' news, time-filling tosh as purveyed weekly by Gaumont British News, British Paramount News and Universal News, is preserved at Visnews for browsers and serious users to consult. So is more recent material. Sir Richard Attenborough's research team has been consulting Visnews' library facilities to get a fix on matter pertinent to his forthcoming film about Steve Biko. The Visnews film library, which incorporates more than 50 million feet of international events since the turn of the century, is the largest of its kind in the world, representing the work of four generations of news cameramen. It was last valued by the directors in 1981 at £700,000 but is clearly now worth far more. Beginning with the official coverage of the coronation of Czar Nicholas II of Russia in 1896, the collection includes the archives of five in their day famous cinema newsreels dating from the era before television. Among these are silent pictures of the events of the century up to about 1930 embodied in now almost forgotten newsreels like Gaumont Graphic and Empire News Bulletin.

There are also specialist collections and compilations showing old British steam trains in colour and black and white, life in the 1930s and an extensive account of the world of Islam. All told, the collection is classified into some 7,000 different subjects and is growing at the rate of 15,000 items a year drawn from contemporary television news. Much of this has been transferred to video for storage purposes. Even so, the Visnews library cannot preserve everything and has to make an intelligent assessment of what it thinks can later be rented or sold. In this respect, Visnews is open to the same criticism that is sometimes levelled at cinémathèques. In making choices between the many films that could be preserved, film libraries are arbitrarily prescribing what the future shall consider important. The issue is still more vexed with news footage because, in a sense, the history books are being written in advance. At least with narrative films, one archive's omissions are likely to be rectified somewhere else.

● If this happened in Peru, would audiences be interested in seeing it? ●



Visnews' New York crew.



UK control room, Visnews Centre.

With historical television material the student sometimes has no other perspective, though WTN runs a parallel archive drawn from its own news services, from ITN and from British Pathé News. With a nice sense of irony, its own oldest item also dates back to 1896. Glory and honour surely await the man who first tracks down a news snippet from 1895.

At the heart of the modern Visnews service is the use of satellites. Daily feeds of news items by this means started in 1975, when Visnews began its Australian transmissions. Japan, Hong Kong and the Gulf states were added the following year and a United States/Japan/Australia link was set up in 1979. The increasing commitment of the company to the use of satellites made it logical eventually to get into the transmission business itself. Accordingly, a joint venture called BrightStar was set up with Western Union in 1983, to provide a 24-hour direct satellite link between North America and Europe. A second satellite service, linking North America with the Pacific Basin, is managed by Visnews' New York subsidiary, Viscom International, on behalf of the Japanese International Joint Users Organisation.

As a service to broadcasters and other users of film and videotape, Visnews also maintains a comprehensive facility specialising in transferring and copying stories between tape formats and converting between television standards. A 24-hour collection and delivery service is available and there are instant clearance arrangements for tapes sent through the leading London airports. A 16mm film processing laboratory is equipped to handle developing, rush printing, duplication and sound transfer requirements.

Visnews Specials, both in the UK and overseas, consist of specialist services purchased by clients for a fee. Overseas, for example, Visnews will supply at the drop of a cheque anything from a complete camera crew to a series of satellite links between Singapore and New York. From the group's nineteen regional offices it can provide news stories, documentaries, promotional videos or simply advice on local laws and customs. The UK equivalent, based in London's Newman Street, also provides studio facilities for live interviews and a fully equipped editing complex connected to the Park Royal headquarters and to the British Telecom tower.

Other facilities include the provision of a wide-ranging stills library and slide service. Training courses for overseas students are also offered at Park Royal. An experimental exchange of personnel has begun with representatives from

Czech television and similar arrangements exist with Russia. None of these students, however, is permitted to write scripts unsupervised. In many of its activities, Visnews is matched by WTN.



With regard to the provision of comprehensive audio-visual services, Visnews clearly meets the dictates of its trust deed. How does it measure up on the score of objectivity? Beyond question, it goes to great lengths to eradicate prejudice. The word 'terrorist', for instance, is never used in Visnews scripts on the excellent grounds that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Nor would any incident involving the killing of innocent bystanders be described as a 'tragedy' (which seems to be carrying even-handedness a bit far). After thirty years, expunging emotive words is almost second nature. 'We don't take sides, we just take pictures' is the company's unofficial motto. And yet a completely objective coverage is impossible. A story is told one way rather than another because the man on the spot pointed his camera at particular aspects of the truth or even because he pointed it in a particular way. The power of the camera angle to prompt a predetermined response is at least as old as the great Soviet silent cinema.

Visnews has no official guidelines for individual cameramen (though none would remain long on the payroll if guilty of blatant bias). What it does do is make sure that the bureau chief in any location has no special axe to grind. In 'touchy' areas, the boss is always an outsider. A Canadian runs the show in Johannesburg, a Korean in Hong Kong, a Nicaraguan in El Salvador and so on. At the time of his appointment, every new bureau chief is brought to London and given a crash course in the philosophy of the company ('They have to know that we're not in the business of comment'). Even so, bias is hard to eliminate. Nobody has been fired from Visnews for colouring the news, but at different times several have had to be cautioned.

Visnews regards that as a good sign. It proves that it is on its toes. In the same way, it takes it as a compliment that both Syria and Israel have accused Visnews in the past of reporting hostilities from the other side's point of view. A copy of each side's objections was promptly sent to the other to refute the allegations. 'I don't think you can get the balance right in any one story,' says Kevin Hamilton. 'What we aim for is to ensure that, over time, nobody can point to us and say "I know why you did that".'

All this is admirable, but may there

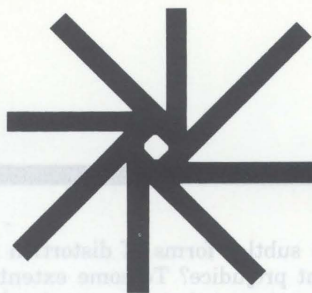
not be subtler forms of distortion than straight prejudice? To some extent, the fact that news is being transmitted by a visual medium encourages the cameraman to film the story in a way that will provide the most striking pictures. Abstract issues look less exciting on a television screen than the violence they often spawn. Which is why stories lasting less than a minute are likely to focus on the spectacle or the gore rather than the debate. There are more words on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph* than in the whole of the BBC's 9 o'clock news.

Visnews is alive to the problem but admits that it does not—perhaps cannot—have the answer. It recognises that because something is dramatic it may assume in television terms an importance it would not otherwise have. Perspective on the news is also hard to preserve. In countries that are hard to penetrate, there is a temptation for the cameraman who gains access to inflate stories of limited international importance out of proportion. By the same token, in countries where access is free, it is easy to fall into the trap of photographing every VIP sneezing. This, of course, is also a hazard of the written word.

Visnews insists that it rejects all free trips arranged by companies or organisations whose bounty might compromise its integrity. Facility trips paid for by governments are sometimes accepted if there would be no other way of entering the country, but any subsequent coverage of the trip frankly discloses who paid for it. This is fine up to a point, but Visnews cannot control its eventual use. Friends or enemies of the government in question could make hay of the report by substituting an alternative voice-over.

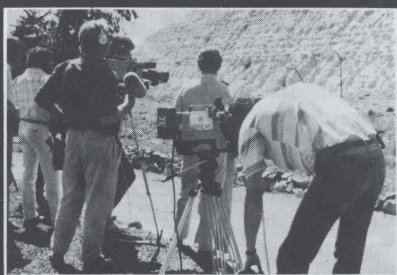
In South Africa, Visnews argues that recent media restrictions have forced cameramen to move away from the graphic depiction of violence to a consideration of the underlying issues, such as the roles of black trade unions, the church and the press. Perhaps, but this is a crumbly rock on which to base an argument. If there were no restrictions, there seems little doubt that those cameramen would concentrate on the violence because it is more dramatic. Indeed, they would be expected to do so. Despite protestations of a willingness to film visually 'dry' subjects ('We're not afraid to be boring; we don't just do knee-jerk stories'), the main attraction is always the colourful episode ('If there is a newsworthy incident, we would expect him to shoot it, brutal or not').

Visnews' idea of a worthy, non-visual story to counter any accusations of an unhealthy preoccupation with violence is sometimes naive. When this article



not be subtle. The straight line? Some extent, the fact that news is being transmitted by a visual medium encourages the cameraman to film the story in a way that will provide the most striking pictures. Abstract issues look less exciting on television screen than the violence they often spawn. Which is why stories last- ing less than a minute are likely to focus on the spectacle or the gore rather than the debate. There are many words on the front page of the Daily Telegraph than in the whole of the next 9 o'clock news. Visnews is alive to the problem but admits that it does not—perhaps cannot—have the answer. It recognises that because something is dramatic it may assume in television terms an importance it would not otherwise have. For- tunately the news is also hard to ignore. In countries that are hard to penetrate, there is temptation for the cameraman who gains access to intru- sive of limited information impor- tance out of proportion to the story. It is easy to fall into the trap of photo- graphing every air meeting. This is

● West Germans
always use a tripod
...while every
Italian cameraman
wants to be
Fellini ●



Visnews in the field:

above, South Africa; below, Lebanon.



was being researched, representatives of the company were deep in discussion about a (then) forthcoming conference on capitalism and socialism in Africa. The problem was language. Most of this conference would be conducted in languages that the bulk of the world would not understand. To have shown delegates in mid (incomprehensible) rhetoric would have been pointless. Visnews' solution (or at least the one it favoured at the time) was to look for an example of a socialist country reaching an accommodation with capitalism. Answer: take shots inside a Heinz factory and then get a Zimbabwean minister to say 'yes, we get on well with capitalists'. It was intended to put out this item three days before the conference. These lines were written too soon to know whether the minister came in on cue.

The texts Visnews supplies with any story it transmits are of a who, what, why and when nature—sterile pieces of information devoid of any slant. That is not necessarily how they will end up on overseas television screens, however, after they have been translated into the client's own language. Visnews can make any number of stipulations that the text must be used intact, but enforcement is virtually impossible.

In terms of budgets, Visnews runs a relatively tight ship. Substantial editing is done in the field before any story is beamed by satellite to London. On an average day, between 800 and 1,000 minutes of film or video are shot but only 70 to 100 minutes are ultimately put out from the London headquarters. This partly reflects the fact that stories shot in some countries are handled in a manner that is not always suitable for world consumption. Camera techniques vary greatly round the world. West Germans, for example, always use a tripod and edit in a markedly teutonic way, while 'every Italian cameraman wants to be Fellini'. Viewers get used to their local cameramen's style and do not want to see the news through a foreigner's eyes. That, quite as much as the parochial nature of an individual story, is the main reason an item hope- fully sent to London by satellite ends up being wiped from the tape.

Budget constraints, however, are never allowed to inhibit the prime object of gathering and disseminating news. If money is tight, Visnews will never- theless spend what is needed to get a balanced story. 'When we sensed in January 1986 that the Philippines was going to be a big story,' says Kevin Hamilton, 'we sent in crews from Baghdad and Tokyo. We would always send people to a distant location if the story demanded it. At our own expense we would send in people to get the other

side of the story if we felt we were in danger of presenting a one-sided picture.' Such impartiality comes dear and makes forward budgeting difficult. It is hard to relate costs that are unpredictable to contracts that are signed far ahead. The all-in cost of despatching a crew to a far location to cover a story lasting several days and then getting it to clients round the world can run to £10,000. Against that, a 20-minute talking-head inter- view with a company chairman might cost a mere £700. Cost differentials notwithstanding, however, neither Visnews nor WTN would neglect to cover a major story simply because it was short of cash.



Visnews' next developments are likely to be in the direction of strengthening its coverage of the communist world. There are already trading associations with Russia (each side takes the other's stories and makes of them what it will). The Russians love shots of policemen charg- ing on horseback and train smashes, as Soviet television, picked up all day by a dish on the roof at Park Royal, makes plain. What Visnews has not had to date is its own man in Moscow or Peking. This was partly by design, since Russia and China are so vast that no one cameraman could cover them from the capitals even if he were free to travel wherever he wished. The nearest Visnews has had to a full communist-world presence was an operation in Poland at the time of the Solidarity crisis.

Now, however, it wants to push vigor- ously into the eastern bloc, not using its own teams but by installing a co- ordinator to work in close association with local crews. Stories shot by local cameramen would greatly enhance the Visnews package so long as it was free to ditch the official line and replace the commentary with its own neutral text. Visnews says that its top priority is to get its own co-ordinators into Moscow and Peking as soon as possible. It thinks the latter post is likely to be filled first—perhaps by this spring if the right man can be found.

Another ambition is to be the world's first purveyor of a 24-hour news service for cable television. Some pilot pro- grammes have already been produced. Whether this might eventually involve a step further down the road towards vertical integration is as yet unclear, though there are strong hints that Visnews is becoming impatient with its role as a mere wholesaler of news and would like greater control over what is done with it by retailers. This could most easily be achieved by becoming a re- tailer itself—not in the British or

Commonwealth markets on account of its present share ownership, but it is hard to see that a cable service to America, Europe or the Far East would conflict with the interests of the BBC or the other minority shareholders.

These ambitions, stated and half stated, add up to a more imaginative programme for the company than has been evident for some years. They are a direct result of the Reuters takeover. It has injected a new dynamism into a group that, whatever the profit figures showed, was at risk of hardening of the arteries. Under Brian Quinn, Visnews had pulled itself up miraculously by its bootstraps. A company that had once been on its uppers had recovered to the point of earning record profits. But it had done so in ways that, from the vantage point of the late 1980s, look fairly conventional—by closing down weak divisions, building up strong ones and making greater use of modern electronic wizardry. So far, so good; but Mr Quinn's imagination or the equity structure of the group as then constituted seemed to inhibit anything more adventurous. In

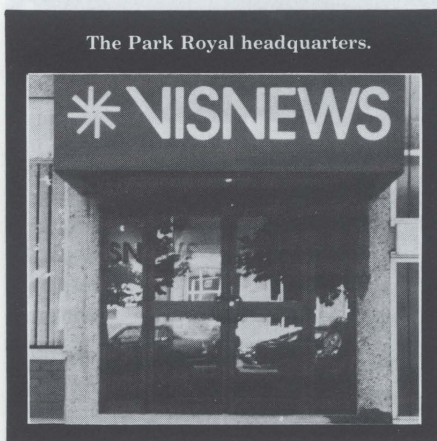
getting out after five years in the job, Brian Quinn demonstrated an admirable ability to assess his own strengths and limitations—coupled with a clear recognition of the ravages of the job (two of his predecessors had died in harness or shortly after stepping down).

The Reuters-inspired thrust into the communist bloc and the move in the direction of vertical integration contrast

sharply with the somewhat jaded notions for expansion that the company had been entertaining before the change of ownership. Visnews' intentions last year were to develop the Asia Pacific interests, to increase the sports coverage and to encourage the American staff to shoot still more original material instead of relying on stories drawn from domestic broadcasters. In the United States, home teams never film anything that could be construed as anti-American, so many stories that should be shot go by default. In Brian Quinn's eyes, material put out by Visnews on America ought to have a fresh outlook on the country. This might be achieved in conjunction with the Japanese.

These are worthy aspirations and would have done Visnews credit. What they lack is that leap of imagination that might lift the company into a new dimension and a new era—or bring it to its knees, depending on the force and stamina of the man in charge. Julian Kerr, four weeks into the job, was learning fast as this corporate profile was prepared: there was much work to do. ■

The Park Royal headquarters.



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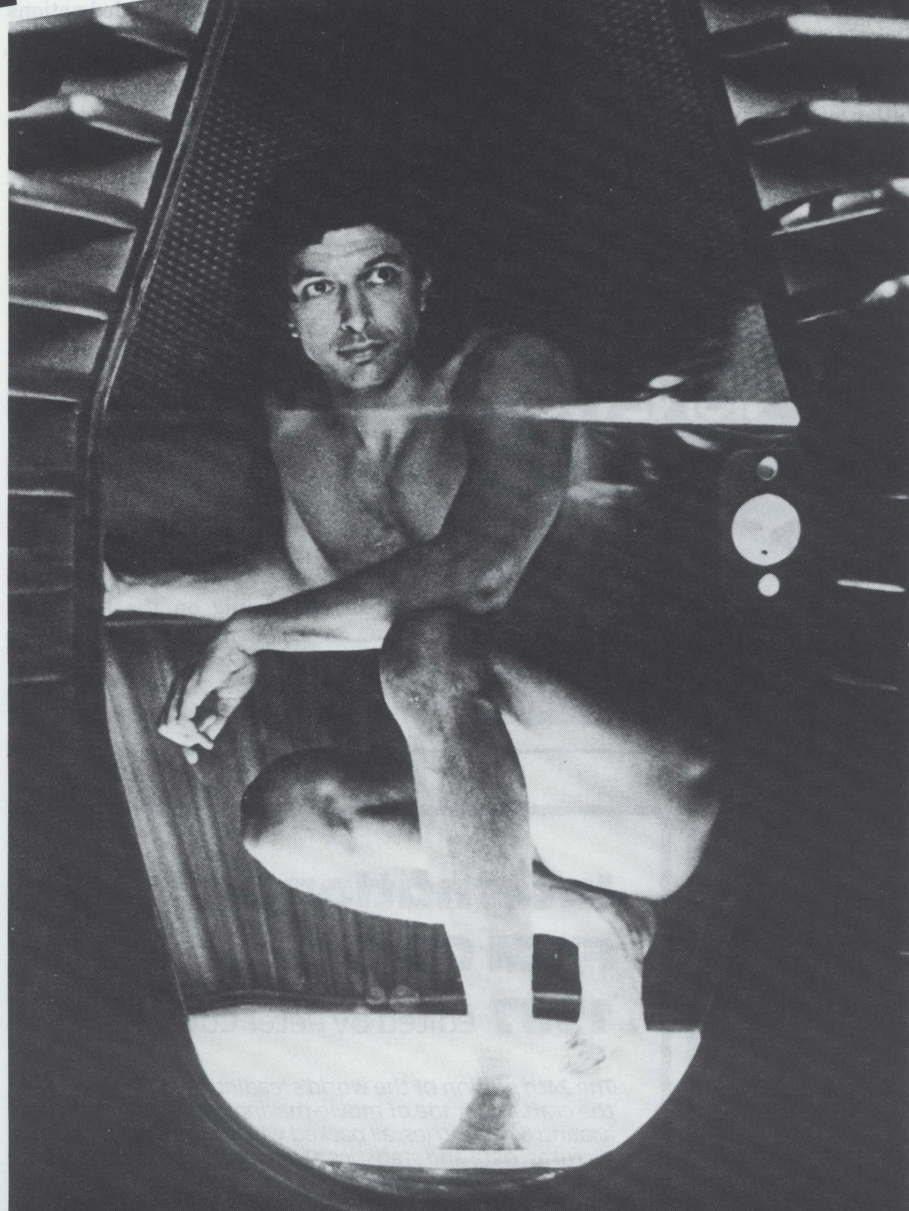
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LETTER FROM NEW YORK



Out of the Blue

TERRENCE RAFFERTY

Commonwealth markets on account of its present share ownership, but it is hard to see that a cable service to America, Europe or the Far East would conflict with the interests of the sec or the other minority shareholders.

These conditions stated and half stated, add up to a more imaginative programme for the company than has been evident for some years. They are a direct result of the Hantors takeover. It has injected a new dynamism into a group that, whatever the profit figure showed, was at risk of hardening of the arteries. Under Brian Quinn, Chairman

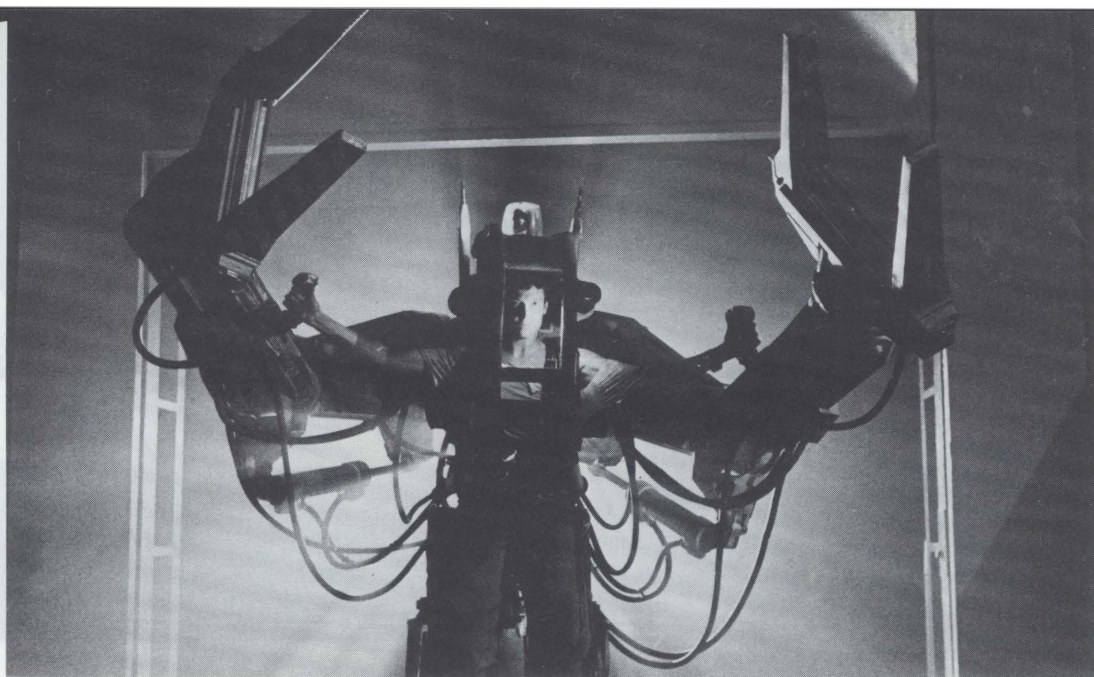
At first, summer 1986 looked like business as usual for American movies: three solid months of big-budget B pictures, with a sequel (James Cameron's *Aliens*) and a remake (David Cronenberg's *The Fly*) standing above the rest at the box office. Critics frothed about the dearth of 'adult' movies, railed against studio executives, videocassette recorders and teenagers, and did their damndest to find something cheering in the season's one prestige (Meryl Streep) picture, *Hearburn*, Mike Nichols' muddled, forlorn little upper-middle-class marital comedy, which proved too frail to bear the weight of all those expectations.

The whole comedy of American movies—the relationships of the film-makers, the audience and the critics—seemed to have settled into a formula, as predictable and as oddly comforting as any low-budget genre picture of the 50s, one of the ones, perhaps, in which a gang of kids hotrodded noisily and aimlessly around town and outraged elders clucked. In some strange way, the situation of American movies in the 80s has been better defined, has had a better story, than the movies themselves: pictures like *Rambo* and *Top Gun* existed far more vividly in the pages of *Variety* and the newsweeklies than they did on screen. If the big box-office movies of the past few years have frustrated criticism as thoroughly as our smash-hit, megagrossing president has defied political analysis, it is perhaps because, as phenomena, they're shifty, amorphous, nearly unidentifiable—if you can't tell what something is, all you can do is line up, uneasily, for or against, designate heroes and villains and hope you have sided with the good guys. The drama surrounding the plight of Hollywood is a story, all right, but it's a children's story.

Now things look as though they have started to change, and we dozed right through the signals. Suddenly, there are interesting movies again—Jonathan Demme's *Something Wild*, David Byrne's *True Stories* and David Lynch's astonishing *Blue Velvet*—and a hint of the excitement American film-making generated in the 1970s. The funny thing

Left: Jeff Goldblum,
before treatment, in
The Fly.

Right: Sigourney
Weaver wearing a
Power Loader in
Aliens.



is that if we had paid close attention to Cameron and Cronenberg's movies, the apparently predictable genre hits of the summer, we might have seen this mini-revival coming.

What is significant about *Aliens* and *The Fly* is that they're both—though in very different ways—true genre pictures. Their studio gloss can't quite disguise the simplicity and single-mindedness of the conception, the meticulous low ingenuity of their execution. For all their commercial aspirations, and their various flaws, both movies have an unusual, almost shocking, purity of narrative. And they provide some sort of perspective on the mega-budget BS that have dominated Hollywood film-making since *Star Wars* had the inspiration to scramble as many genres as possible—science fiction, high fantasy, Westerns, war movies—into a multi-purpose concoction.

What mattered to George Lucas was simply the *feeling* of being a stomping, screaming kid at a Saturday matinée, and he knew he could evoke it without having to observe any specific set of narrative conventions—without, that is, having to limit his movie's appeal to a science-fiction-movie audience, a war-movie audience, or whatever. He designed his movie to appeal indiscriminately, to please any which way, and it had every B-movie attitude except the crucial one: take it or leave it.

This kind of film has been popping up in various guises ever since: as action-adventure movies, like the Indiana Jones films; as Westerns (Lawrence Kasdan's *Silverado*); as horror movies (the Spielberg/Hooper *Poltergeist*); as films noirs (Taylor Hackford's remake of *Out of the Past, Against All Odds*); and even as martial arts pictures (John Carpenter's recent, disastrous *Big Trouble in Little China*). Not all these pictures were successful at the box office, but they all had pretty much the same purpose—to whip audiences into a benign frenzy—and they shared a hip, tongue-in-cheek attitude towards their material, as if their makers wanted to

assure us that they knew there was nothing there. At their best, the trash-movie extravaganzas could be brilliant formalist entertainments (*Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, Joe Dante's *Gremlins*) or carefree, goofy novelties, like W. D. Richter's *Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*. Most, though, simply seemed desperate, because the scale was all wrong: they were carnival magic shows presented as if they were grand opera.

Real B movies, of the kind that Manny Farber might have liked—sparse, speedy, mean little numbers that got in and out of your consciousness fast—didn't stand much of a chance. If there was ever a director born to make genre movies, it's Walter Hill, and he hasn't flourished. Hill seems to have been confused equally by the failure of his sensational genre pictures *The Long Riders* and *Southern Comfort* and the success of the messy, corrupt *48 Hrs*: the last three films he has directed have been hopelessly compromised attempts to find the elusive commercial formula again.

Aliens, which he produced and took a story credit on but didn't direct, is practically a remake of the financially calamitous *Southern Comfort*; but this time around, substituting outer space for the Louisiana bayou and acid-dripping monsters for stealthy Cajuns, it's an enormous hit. Although James Cameron is not quite the action virtuoso that Hill is, he has a similarly clean, straightforward style and he knows how to build tension. He keeps the story simple and the setting claustrophobic—the movie is all chases through the dark, narrow passageways of the alien-infested space colony—and the effect is both terrifying and rather reassuring. Good B movies have always had this hemming-in quality, the reduction of our focus to a small group of characters, settings that are already familiar or (because they're so limited) that become familiar, and a single, starkly defined narrative problem: they wedge us in a tight frame.

In the kind of B movies that *Aliens* is modelled on, those restrictions were a

function of budget. Cameron doesn't have to limit himself, so he can get a star (Sigourney Weaver) and quite a few more monsters than Corman or Samuel Arkoff ever dreamed of, but the scale, somehow, doesn't alter the movie's pulp nature. Though he doesn't need to, this director really believes in the power of this stylised, stripped-down form of storytelling. We sense his conviction both in the logic of his screenplay and in the amazingly affecting performance he has drawn from Sigourney Weaver.

Like Cameron, David Cronenberg understands and trusts the narrative conventions: both these guys come from within. But where Cameron seems content with putting some meat on the bare bones of his formula stories, in Cronenberg's movies the skeleton is always threatening to burst right through the skin. In *The Fly*, the skeleton is, of course, the original film, a pretty undistinguished 50s B about a scientist whose failed experiments leave him stuck with a gigantic fly's head on top of his still-human body. Cronenberg's treatment streamlines this basic horror-movie conceit almost to the point of abstraction—and complicates it emotionally at the same time. This *Fly* is a chamber-movie of horrors, as spare and depopulated as one of Bergman's island psychodramas.

The island here is the loft-laboratory of scientist Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum), who has been monkeying around with a pair of homemade teleportation pods, trying to find a way of transporting objects from one place to another by molecular recombination. It's practically the only setting, and Brundle and his girlfriend, a magazine writer named Veronica (Geena Davis), are virtually the only characters. (Veronica's editor and jealous former lover, played by John Getz, flits in and out of the action, just to give the plot some mild twists.) Brundle becomes a monster in a much more alarming way than the 50s fly-man did: human and insect characteristics are all mixed up in him, every cell genetically altered, so that he is never fully one



thing or the other. His transformation isn't a sideshow stunt, it's like a horrible, wasting disease, and Brundle's body never really looks like a fly's—it's just a riot of grotesquely mutating flesh. (The suggestions of cancer and AIDS are obviously intended.)

Cronenberg has no interest in some of the staples of 50s horrors: the threatened townspeople, the screaming in the streets, the tabloid headlines. His minimalism evokes the impoverished feel of those earlier films, but, because it's deliberate, it goes much farther: he seems to have isolated, in remarkably potent form, the poignant monster strain that runs through so many horror pictures. Thematically, *The Fly* is very ambitious—still, it's conceived entirely in B-movie terms, with gooey make-up effects that Cronenberg can't help lingering on, exploitation-style. Like Cameron, he's a literal-minded director, relentless rather than visually imaginative, and this slightly plodding quality is more damaging to *The Fly* than it is to *Aliens*. Cameron always has action to fall back on; Cronenberg can only build his effects by inventing ever more grotesque distortions and violations of the body. At first we take it, and finally, exhausted by the long parade of flatly presented horror variations, we leave it.

Aliens and *The Fly* certainly aren't great movies, but there was something refreshing about their drive, their doggedness in working out their premises. These were movies that seemed to accept, and even to insist on, their own limitations: these film-makers were perfectly happy with the forms of genre-movie storytelling, committed to their small moments of B-picture truth. Of course, that's not as exciting as what the smart American directors of the 70s were doing: Altman was using genres as frames for his loose, satiric riffs on American society; Coppola's *Godfather* films had a trashy, bestseller momentum that gave a hard edge to the movies' elegiac tone; Scorsese's realism in *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver* drew heat from the films' explicit violence and lurid, feverish camerawork; and De Palma's dirty-minded cunning turned *The*

Phantom of the Paradise, *Carrie* and *The Fury* into a new kind of teenage exploitation poetry.

These film-makers used genre and B-movie motifs and techniques in a very free way, giving their serious contemporary subjects the rough, uneven texture they needed because the A-movie version of American life made less sense than ever: something meaner, unrulier and more hyperbolic was in the air. The movies actually gained credibility by appropriating, selectively, the disreputable energy of schlock. In a sense, American directors made interesting pictures in the 70s by taking the classic Corman formula—sex and violence made half-respectable with a light brushing of 'socially conscious' themes—and turning it on its head.

All this, however, depended on the existence of a lively B-picture subculture for more adventurous film-makers to feed on; and that, somehow, began to disappear. Scorsese and De Palma and company had taken over the good qualities, and Lucas and his ilk had inflated and streamlined the bad. *Aliens* and *The Fly*, along with Cameron's earlier *The Terminator* and Stuart Gordon's grisly, over-the-top Lovecraft adaptations, *Re-Animator* and *From Beyond*, are signs that trash movies may be getting over their identity crisis, are confident again in the efficiency of their cheap thrills. This doesn't necessarily mean that we're in for better American movies fight away, but it does suggest that the amorphous, compromised style of Hollywood entertainments in the last few years may be passing and that, with more sharply defined distinctions among genres and between A and B pictures, ambitious film-makers might, as they did ten years ago, manage to shake us up by making the disparate elements collide.

Jonathan Demme's new *Something Wild* is a gesture in that direction, though not a fully successful one. It's a road movie, a sordid thriller and a lifestyle-clash romantic of the *After Hours/Desperately Seeking Susan* type, all at once. Demme

is best known for his quirky, gently satiric middle-American comedies *Citizens Band* (or *Handle With Care*) and *Melvin and Howard* and the Talking Heads concert film *Stop Making Sense*, but he's also a past master of subtle genre subversion. He worked for Corman in the mid-70s, making a women-in-prison picture called *Caged Heat*, a loopy criminal family road movie called *Crazy Mama* and the surprisingly lyrical rural vengeance melodrama *Fighting Mad*. Even *Citizens Band*, with its elegant structure and graceful temperament, was still at least half an exploitation picture, conceived and marketed to cash in on a current craze. (And it never shook the exploitation label in New York, where it flopped dismally despite good reviews and a screening at the New York Film Festival.) *Something Wild* is a throwback to Demme's Corman-era style, a smart, kinky, unpredictable little movie that winds up being unexpectedly disturbing.

The movie begins as if it is just another walk-on-the-wild-side comedy for young professionals, as a New York business type (Jeff Daniels) is whisked away for a lunch-hour joyride by a free spirit (Melanie Griffith) who wears a jet-black Louise Brooks wig and calls herself Lulu. As they get farther from the city and Lulu's behaviour gets farther out—she robs a liquor store and, a few miles down the turnpike, handcuffs the semi-horrified Daniels to a motel bed for their afternoon love-making—the businessman realises that his long lunch is turning into a lost weekend, and he starts to enjoy the unaccustomed dirty thrills of life on the road.

The tone to this point is weird but light, and the 'wild' escapades are, though rougher-edged, as apparently inconsequential as the farcical misadventures in *Desperately Seeking Susan* and *After Hours*. But this picture, like *Bonnie and Clyde*, really turns about halfway through, with the introduction of a cynical lowlife (Ray Liotta) from Lulu's hometown, an ex-con who isn't wild like a party, but wild like an animal. He is a small-town psycho,



Left to right:
Something Wild: Melanie
 Griffith, Jeff Daniels.
True Stories.
Blue Velvet: Kyle
 MacLachlan.

boiling with resentment, and his unsavoury presence makes a dangerous mockery of the freedom Daniels has been enjoying. From here on, Demme tries to juggle screwball comedy with something twisted and truly ugly: the second half of this movie is like *It Happened One Night* rewritten by Patricia Highsmith.

That is certainly an ambitious, suggestive concept—unfortunately, there's no way to *do* it, even for a director as intelligent and controlled as Demme. He shoots the violent scenes in the overlit, head-on style of exploitation movies, emphasising their contrast to the graceful comic sequences elsewhere in the picture, and the mixture of tones is a little too rich for the material. The melodrama and the romantic comedy seem to work themselves out separately, as if in parallel, so that everything, in the end, feels sordid. What Demme stirs up here is too volatile for abrupt, casual B-movie resolutions.

Something Wild is both less satisfying and more substantial than the directorial debut of David Byrne, Talking Heads' lead singer and songwriter and Demme's collaborator on *Stop Making Sense*. *True Stories*, which is set entirely in a (fictional) ordinary Texas town on the occasion of its 150th anniversary, is a kind of anti-genre picture, an idling road movie, in which the driver just seems to have pulled over to look around for a while and to indulge the traveller's fantasy of actually living in the places he passes through. Byrne brings his New York new-wave sensibility to bear on this Southwestern middle-class community, with its shopping malls and housing developments and cheerful air of progress. He puts on a cowboy hat and a string tie, looking about as comfortable as Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda did sitting in a café full of rednecks in *Easy Rider*, and takes us on an easy tour of the town and its amiable eccentrics.

Byrne has a wonderful eye for the beauties of natural and manmade landscape, and for the poignance and humour of the ways people find to make the materials given them in a chintzy, pre-fab culture seem their own. As enjoyable as this is, though, it's touristy—like

circling the town in a bus with giant windows. What the movie lacks is urgency: this town has been chosen as arbitrarily as any of the stops along the way in a road picture, but since nothing really happens there, there seems no special reason either to go or to stay. The road movies that Corman's New World company specialised in during the 70s had towns like this one, and the pictures got their narrative momentum from these places' inhospitality: as in *Something Wild*, they kept moving by creating situations that build to an impassioned 'Let's get out of here.' Without that kind of drive, but with the stranger-in-town perspective that usually goes with it, Byrne's movie is a little static, stalled in a dream of sharing other people's lives—of standing still and calling 'home' whatever grows up around you. It's a lovely idea, whether Byrne really believes it or is simply trying it on for size. For a movie-maker, though, 'Let's get out of here' is usually a better one.

Then there's *Blue Velvet*, a film so rich that it seems to include and (almost) justify everything that has been happening in American movies in the last ten years. It's set in a fictional small town, like Byrne's movie, and is about an innocent's education in the darker human impulses, like Demme's film. It is also a compendium of styles, with elements drawn from teenage mysteries, porn films, coming-of-age movies, Capra-style family comedies, *films noirs*, Hitchcockian psychosexual thrillers, horror movies, all combining with the elusive rightness of a bad dream. There is nothing calculated or intellectualised about Lynch's approach: we simply feel, in every frame, how deeply pop culture imagery has penetrated his imagination, see the dark colours it has added to his nightmares.

His adolescent hero, Jeffrey (Kyle MacLachlan), who lives in the placid mill town of Lumberton, gets involved in his mystery when he stumbles on a severed human ear in a vacant lot near his home. Jeffrey's boy-detective investigations lead him on a perilous tour

of the seedy side of his hometown: he gets to know—first voyeuristically, then more intimately—the nightclub singer Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini), who's being threatened and abused by a sadistic thug named Frank (Dennis Hopper, at his most alarming). The boy's descent into the hell that Lumberton becomes when the sun goes down and all the doors are closed is like a teenager's nightmare projection of the dangers of adult experience: everyone is a criminal or a victim, sex is sordid and brutal, the solution of every mystery is the revelation of an unimaginable perversion.

This vision is so extreme that it is often deliberately funny, but it's also genuinely horrifying, because *Blue Velvet*'s strange world really feels like home ground—for Jeffrey, for Lynch (who is returning to *Eraserhead* territory after his unproductive detour into outer space, *Dune*) and for us. The heightened tawdriness of Lynch's style, evoking the B-movie and jukebox nightmares that insinuate themselves into the real, remembered traumas of our lives, is somehow truer to our experience than anything that has been seen in American movies in a long time.

Blue Velvet takes us farther into our collective past than, say, Francis Coppola's new *Peggy Sue Got Married*, a whimsical time-travel movie that transports Kathleen Turner from her twenty-fifth high school reunion right back into her own adolescence—all, it turns out, in the service of some fuzzy Capraesque homilies about how everything is for the best in this best of all possible neighbourhoods. *Peggy Sue* doesn't represent anybody's actual experience, least of all Coppola's. He has never before made anything like this glazed commercial entertainment; it's a throwback to the sort of picture that his own movies in the 70s seemed to have given the lie to for good. If we, film-makers and filmgoers, really want to go home again, we would do better to follow Lynch. For Americans, at least, the artifacts of junk culture—genres and B pictures—are home. No matter how badly we want to get out, the stuff sticks to us, like gunk from some special-effects monster. ■



Lynda Myles with Gabriel Byrne, star of *Defence of the Realm*.

Coca-Cola adults

The appointment of Lynda Myles as European representative for the new David Puttnam regime at Columbia seems to have been received with universal rejoicing—not exactly usual in the movie business. One reason is her track record. As Edinburgh Film Festival director in the 1970s, she wrenched the ageing institution away from its image of dourness and documentary and Griersonian granite (Grierson himself, I wouldn't mind betting, might rather have admired the change). In 1980 she disappeared to run the Pacific Film Archive at Berkeley, California. Two years later she was back, developing projects at Puttnam's Enigma Films and co-producing the political thriller *Defence of the Realm*. There is also the matter of style: Lynda Myles has achieved executive status without acquiring a trace of the executive steel shell, and the press loves her for it. Her new title is the catch-all 'senior vice president'; her area, 'creative affairs'; her territory, Europe.

Europe means France, Italy, Germany, Spain—and Britain. In fact, Lynda Myles' first exercise, on which she was setting out at about the time of writing, is to sound out directors on the continent (no names disclosed at this stage) who might be attracted to work for Columbia. One stipulation is that the films must be in English. 'Does that mean American?' I ask. 'English,' she reiterates. Columbia has nothing on in Europe at the moment, so she is not inheriting a backlog of titles from a previous administration. In any case, she would always rather start from scratch with a film-maker than come

in on something already in progress.

Her appointment was so recent that a budget for her creative affairs had not yet been agreed; she would know more about that after a trip to Los Angeles which was to follow the European sortie. One purpose of this adventurous and imaginative appointment, she suggested, was to let film-makers know that they can count on having someone paying attention at the other end of the telephone. Mentally, Los Angeles is still a long way from Europe. Projects can sink without trace between the two. As far as she knows, her post is the only one of its kind. Columbia has no one, for instance, trawling the Far East.

David Puttnam, who has already been back to London and was also recently in Moscow, is said to be in the best of spirits, even if he did upset some of those ever tender Hollywood susceptibilities by riding his bicycle to work. A problem for him, and for Lynda Myles, must be the time it takes for plans to work their way through to the screen. His appointment is for three-and-a-half years; and it is likely to be the end of 1988, or thereabouts, before product with the Puttnam stamp hits the cinemas.

Anyone near the top in British filmmaking, as David Puttnam has been for a long time, must feel that he is engaged on one of those depressing fairytale labours where the work is never done—the yarn laboriously spun by day is mysteriously unravelled by night, or whatever. Puttnam has been a restive mogul. He talked of taking a year off at Harvard, even of leaving the business altogether. Columbia, now of course a division of the Coca-Cola empire, with whatever that entails in the way of expectation of profit, offers the irresistible challenge not only of power but of

getting things done. As Lynda Myles emphasises about her own end of the operation, when a project has been agreed it can be expected to happen. In Europe, energies that should be used creatively are too often drained in scrabbling for cash.

Puttnam has made his name as a producer of films fit for grown-ups to look at. He's also a bit of a moralist, not one for irresponsible screen violence. Perhaps his Columbia appointment could be taken as a signal that Hollywood is moving away from its current phase, as a toy factory with a sideline in very violent games. Or perhaps not. In any event, Puttnam watchers, as well as Hollywood watchers, are in for an interesting three years.

The Charlotte Street Triangle

The story of Channel 4 and its little red triangles has been decidedly entertaining. The triangle, which has not as yet been attached to a great many films (only half-a-dozen or so) is a symbol alerting late night channel-hoppers or casual switchers-on that what is on view belongs somewhere at the steamier end of the cinema's 'x' certificate category. It was adopted by Channel 4, for an experimental six-month period, after all the rumpus about Winston Churchill's censorship bill and the Channel's screenings of *Jubilee* and *Sebastiane*. The Gibbonian excuse that the latter was clothed in the decent obscurity of a learned language, if in little else, did not go down too well with Mrs Whitehouse and her allies.

Like most matters of censorship, the triangles can be looked at in two ways. From one point of view, Channel 4 has made a pusillanimous, nervous bob towards the censorship lobby. From another, it has made a cheeky gesture in positively advertising its unseemly wares. Indeed, only the very naive could have failed to realise, long before the first triangles hit the screen, that for every viewer switching off in distaste and grateful for the warning, there would be several more, equally grateful for the warning, switching on. Jeremy Isaacs and the Channel 4 management, it goes without saying, are not known for naivety.

As well as contriving to irritate both the pro- and anti-censorship factions, the triangles have not been much appreciated by viewers. One woman, I'm told, objected in particularly engaging terms: she did not take kindly to being reminded, all the time she was watching a film, that someone, somewhere, disapproved of her watching it. And there is the aesthetic point. Directors fighting the colourisation battle might divert some energy to pointing out the damage

a little red blob lurking at the top of the screen can do to a carefully composed shot. The motorway fog scene in Antonioni's *Identification of a Woman* benefited particularly from this novel intrusion, as the actors appeared to be groping towards precisely the sort of triangle a conscientious driver would set up after a breakdown.

Mrs Whitehouse, for her part, moved in as smartly as usual, sending letters of complaint to advertisers whose wares had been promoted during the September screening of *Themroc*, the first triangled movie. Lloyds Bank, Bank of Scotland, Hill Samuel, Sainsbury's and Kelloggs all agreed to boycott the films, 'in the interests of decency and good taste', as Lloyds rather pompously put it. This won't presumably, severely dent Channel 4's advertising revenue (are cornflakes widely advertised, in any case, outside the hours children watch?), but it encourages tabloid headlines about 'Telly Porn Breaks' and 'Sex Shockers' which do the moralistic cause no harm.

It seems odds on that at the end of the experimental period the triangles will quietly fade away. It is presumably to emphasise that television has no connection with cinema, and is governed by entirely different rules, that the TV companies remove the BBFC certificates before screening prints.

Dancing feet

The profile of Michael Powell on a recent South Bank Show was, as expected, fairly riveting stuff. Anyone fixed by those beady and still startlingly blue eyes is likely to stay fixed. The spry octogenarian plays up to the hilt, and with unflagging relish, his hard-won role as Grand Old Man of British cinema. He won't let the press forget what they said about *Peeping Tom*, but he must feel that by now amends have been made. The well-honed anecdotes are delivered with fine exactitude and an actor's timing; and, for all the prolixity of his autobiography, *A Life in Movies*, the on-screen Powell has the canniest sense of the virtues of silence, of letting one word do the work of ten.

The show was affected, in an exaggerated form, by a current documentary fashion: restlessness, even fidgetiness, about changes of scene. One could suspect that there must be some annual prize, which no one has thought to tell us about, for the director who can manoeuvre his subject into the greatest number of locations in the shortest time. Powell popped up in the old Victorine Studios in Nice, caressing a Bell and Howell; at Denham, surveying the relics of Korda's lost empire; in Canterbury; he wore a beret, an exotic waistcoat; he clutched a golf umbrella, as though about to break into a chorus from *Singin'*



Themroc, the first of Channel 4's red triangle films.

in the Rain. He virtually clambered into clips from his films. A member of the production team totted up the locations for me and arrived at fourteen. It felt like more.

All this scampering about probably did the Powell programme no great harm, given its subject's domination of wherever he happened to be found, apparently innocently loitering. In general, however, this is a trend which suggests that programme-makers have no great trust in their subjects, simply as people we might like to listen to uninterrupted, and no great trust in their audiences either. Adults, increasingly, are credited with the attention span of infants, to be cajoled and beguiled with the little lollipops of pretty, changing views. There's also a parsimonious point to be made. Television complains interminably about its own mounting costs. They mightn't rise quite so fast if directors thought twice about transporting crews hither and yon for what they must know in advance will be the smallest snippets of screen time.

Michael Powell's current form is well exposed, not least in his book, so there were few surprises in the programme. Two of his comments, however, seem worth recording. First, there was a slight shift in the screenwriting balance. Powell praised, as always, Emeric Pressburger's mastery of construction. But Pressburger, he now says, never entirely grasped the finer nuances of English conversational tone. When Deborah Kerr tells Roger Livesey (Colonel Blimp) not to hum, the dialogue is Powell's. And so on.

In connection with the blood-stained conclusion of *The Red Shoes*, and the namby-pamby critical reaction that this wasn't the way they wanted a fairytale

to end, Powell came out with his most flamboyant assertion. The dancer had died for her art; the film-maker was quite prepared to die for his. The interviewer, Melvyn Bragg, looked distinctly apprehensive, as though afraid Powell might be about to demand some instant demonstration of devotion to television. At 81, Powell's own willingness to die for his art is unlikely to be put to the test; he has lived for it, which is more to the point.

Sloughed on

A company which owns half-a-dozen West End theatres plans to extend its operations to the cinema business. Its first move is to spend some £3.5 million converting a building in the centre of Slough into a ten-screen complex. Not so long ago, any such announcement might well have left one questioning the sanity of those involved. Today, though no one is likely to see the investment as gilt-edged, at least it's feasible to wish them well.

This is some measure of the turnaround in the fortunes, or at any event the state of mind, of cinema exhibition in Britain. Two or three years ago, the poor thing was on its deathbed, and there weren't too many mourners standing by. The nouveaux riches heirs, video and cable, would have been too busy to attend the funeral; television might have managed only a crocodile tear for its old mate. Now, like the heroine of some lugubrious Victorian novel, always faltering and failing but never quite extinguished, exhibition is once again on its feet and taking nourishment. *Screen International* recently described it as the



The Maybox team: Stephen Waley-Cohen, Bill Freedman, Ben Freedman.

only thriving sector of the British film industry.

The remission could turn out to be merely temporary, but it can't all be put down to *Rambo*, *A Room with a View* and the other titles that have been bringing back the queues. We may be becoming less of a nation of stay-at-homes. Pop music no longer holds the allegiance of a few years ago. Video, conceivably, may have done cinema a good turn, simply by reminding people of its existence. And, with many a creak and setback, the cinema business itself is slowly realising that its attitudes and amenities have to be brought into line with the way people live. Audiences won't flock to crumbling, run-down buildings, which trap them in their seats for acres of local advertising before the feature starts.

The multiplex is the winning style: the cinema as supermarket, with its promise of wide choice, instant availability and the feeling that there's a lot going on. Britain's first, the Point at Milton Keynes, is by all accounts a roaring success, as are other European ventures from Oslo to Ghent. A survey at a Boston multiplex intriguingly revealed that as many as 40 per cent of the audience only make up their minds about the evening's film after arriving at the cinema. The old-style choice, with several high street cinemas within walking distance, was the basis for the casual evening at 'the flicks'; new-style choice offers much the same.

Maybox, the company venturing into Slough, has links with Chesterfield Properties (owners of the Curzon cinema group) and with an American chain, us Cinemas Inc. Its chief executives, Stephen Waley-Cohen, from publishing, and Bill Freedman, a Canadian with a background in cinema, received the press in an engagingly incongruous setting: on stage at the Whitehall Theatre, in front of the solidly well-dressed period

set for J. B. Priestley's *When We Are Married*. Slough is to be the first of several cinemas, with a multiplex in Wales on the cards. Their plans include fashionable design (by Wolff Olins/Hamilton), programmes free from screen advertising, and prices 'lower than the industry average'. British prices, they argue, amount to 'far more in real terms than in any other western country.'

I ask Ben Freedman, son of Bill Freedman and himself a veteran of British Film Year, about the choice of Slough, an uninspired town still bearing the curse of Betjeman. Everyone, he counters, goes to Slough, even if not everyone admits to having been there. More seriously, it's a convenient centre for an area which, from Maidenhead to Windsor, is by no means well off for cinemas. The Maybox complex there should open before the end of the year. Its programming policy remains to be thought about, but subtitled films, on some of the ten screens, are by no means ruled out.

Mixed drinks

How many different drinks does Laszlo (Paul Henreid) order in *Casablanca*? Even the ninety per cent of the population who must feel they know the film's dialogue by heart might be foxed by that one. The answer, it appears, is four: Cointreau, a cocktail, cognac and whisky. The information comes from an essay on *Casablanca* and the cult film by Umberto Eco. The explanation, Eco suggests, is not that Laszlo was an eclectic drinker, or that scriptwriters can be forgivably lackadaisical on such fine points, but that Michael Curtiz 'was simply quoting, unconsciously, similar situations in other movies and trying to provide a reasonably complete repetition of them.'

I don't think I believe this. But Eco on *Casablanca* is worth seeking out (the essay is in a collection called *Travels in Hyperreality*, Secker and Warburg, 1986). His view of cult films is that they should not 'reveal a coherent philosophy of composition' but actually benefit from something rickety in the construction—as in *Casablanca*, where no one knew how the story was going to end. 'One must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge it, so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole.' The *Casablanca* authors 'mixed a little of everything, and everything they chose came from a repertoire that had stood the test of time. . . To make a good story, a single archetype is usually enough. But *Casablanca* is not satisfied with that. It uses them all.'

All the archetypes, says Eco, can be found in the film's first twenty minutes, and he reels off a splendid list, from *Casablanca* as the Magic Door to the Promised Land, of course requiring the Magic Key (the transit letters) to 'The Faithful Servant and the Beloved Master, Don Quixote and Sancho' and 'Play it (again Sam). Anticipated quotation of Woody Allen.' 'Two clichés make us laugh but a hundred move us, because we sense dimly that the clichés are talking among themselves, celebrating a reunion.'

The essence is that *Casablanca* became a cult film because it never set out to be one. Quotations self-consciously used in modern movies 'born in order to become cult objects' are quite another matter. 'Spielberg and Lucas are semiotically nourished authors working for a culture of instinctive semioticians.' Eco ends his urbane essay: 'It will be a sad day when a too smart audience will read *Casablanca* as conceived by Michael Curtiz after having read Calvino and Barthes. But that day will come. Perhaps we have been able to discover here, for the last time, the Truth. . .'

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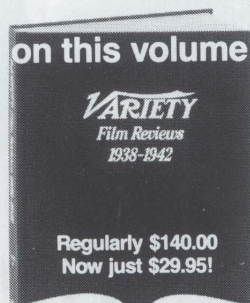
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Paul Henreid in *Casablanca*.



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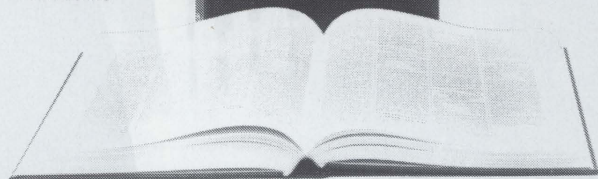
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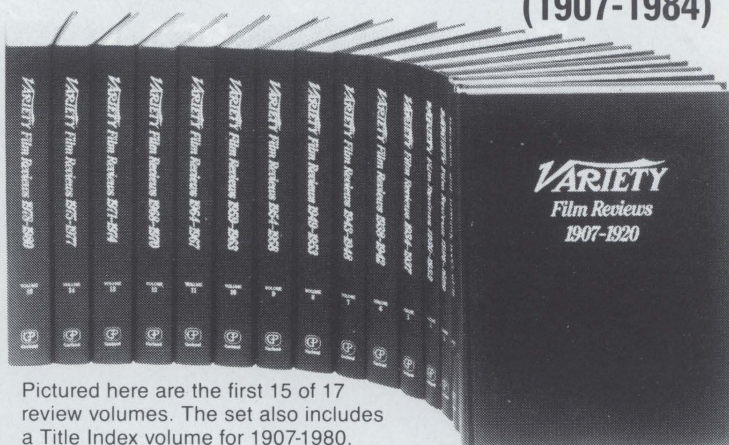


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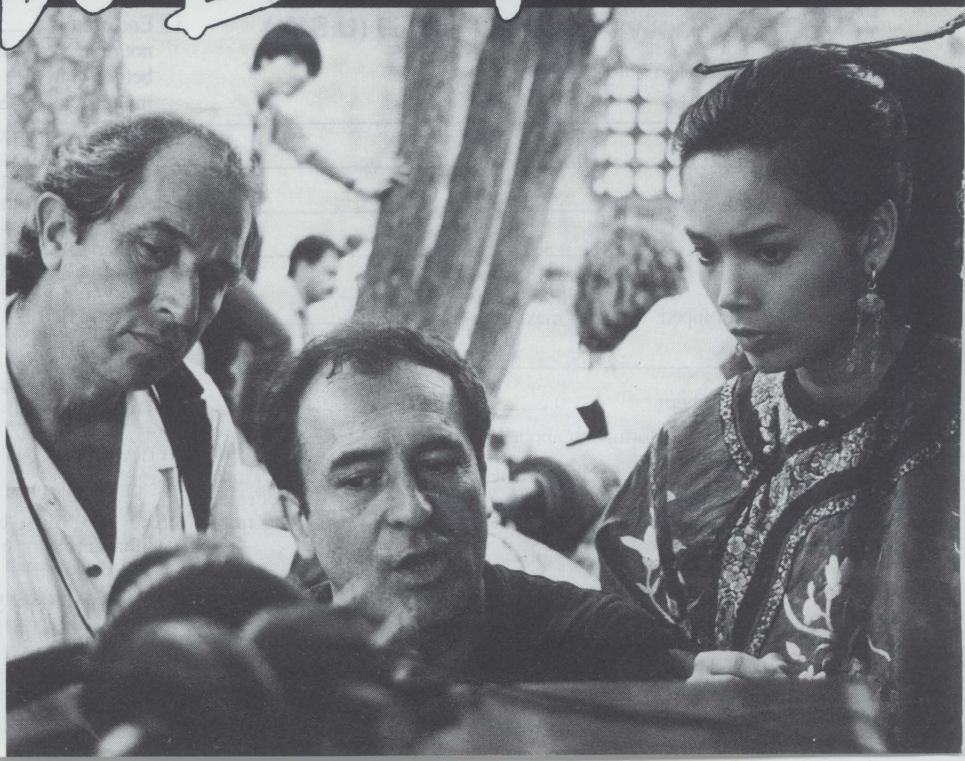
Photos: ANGELO NOVI

Above: The Infant Pu Yi is presented to Empress Dowager Cixi, on her deathbed.

Bertolucci in Beijing

Below: Peter O'Toole.

Below right: Storaro, Bertolucci and actress Jade Go.



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Index compiled by Patricia Coward (subjects) and
 Sylvia Loeb (contributors).

The last movie I did was on the Italian present—on the unhappiness of the Italian present. I felt a desire to go as far from that as possible.' Bernardo Bertolucci isn't kidding. Sitting in a dark corner of one of Nando Scarfiotti's elaborate sets in Beijing Film Studio, while Vittorio Storaro and his crew set up the first shot of the day, the politics and social problems of Rome seem very remote indeed. His planned adaptations of Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* and Alberto Moravia's *1934* never got beyond the idea stage, and so Bertolucci has come to China to film the life of Pu Yi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, who ascended the throne at the age of three in 1908 and was deposed by Sun Yat-Sen's republic three years later.

Pu Yi's life spans all the major developments in modern Chinese history. He grew up cloistered in the Forbidden City, until the warlord Feng Yuxiang threw him out in 1924; he then took refuge secretly (with two wives and a large entourage) in the Japanese Concession in Tianjin, and turned into something of a westernised playboy. In 1931, the Japanese installed him as puppet emperor of their newly occupied Manchuria, renamed 'Manchukuo' for the occasion. He was arrested by the Russians at the end of World War Two and handed over to Mao's Communist government in 1949. After ten years of imprisonment and 're-education', he was given a manual job in the capital's Botanical Gardens, and married a nurse. His 'autobiography' *From Emperor to Citizen* (actually ghosted by Li Wenda and a committee of Party hacks) was published in 1964. He died of cancer in October 1967, some twenty months after the start of the 'Cultural Revolution'.

There are the evident makings of another *Novecento* here—aristo-chic decadence versus the rise of the working class over half a century—but Bertolucci sees the film as having a comparatively tight focus. 'The theme of this movie is change. Can a man change? The story of Pu Yi is a story of metamorphosis. From emperor to citizen . . . from caterpillar to butterfly. The extraordinary thing is that the film's story for some reason coincides completely with China today. China is changing, a big mutation is in progress. Even Chinese cinema is changing. The movie is somehow in synch with that.'

Bertolucci and his co-writer Mark Peploe are using a flashback structure to tame the sprawl of Pu Yi's life. Pu Yi was instructed to write down his personal memories in exercise books during his years in prison, as part of the re-education process. With the prison scenes as a framework, the film-makers are dipping selectively into the man's childhood, using child actors to play him at the ages of three, ten and fifteen. The real challenges of the role go to John Lone (the Al Pacino character in *Year of the Dragon*, and star of Phil Noyce's forthcoming *Promises to Keep*), who plays him from 18 to 61. Lone heads a substantial number of Chinese-

Americans in the cast; the \$23 million budget imposes an English-language soundtrack, and California is the main source of ethnic Chinese who are competent to act in English. Two dialogue coaches are consequently on hand at all times to iron out American accents. However, three Chinese nationals also make notable appearances: veteran star Li Wei turns up in a non-speaking role as the father of Pu Yi's wet-nurse; distinguished stage actor Ying Ruocheng (linchpin of Arthur Miller's Beijing production of *Death of a Salesman*) plays the prison governor, an idealistic, first-generation Communist; and Chen Kaige, the young director of *Yellow Earth*, acts for the first time in his life as a captain in the Imperial Guard. The solitary non-Chinese in the cast is Peter O'Toole, who appears to be swanning through his part as Reginald Johnston, the Scottish tutor who guided Pu Yi through his teens.

Watching Bertolucci at work on the set—and, a couple of days later, on location with hundreds of extras in the



Forbidden City—revealed anything but a slavish fidelity to the script. John Lone's entry as the 18-year-old emperor was written as a static scene around the throne: he accuses his court eunuchs of stealing from the Imperial Palace and overturns tradition by cutting off his pigtail. Bertolucci decided on impulse to make more of it, dividing the scene into two and playing the first half with Pu Yi practising kung-fu, menacing the three eunuchs with a dagger as he remonstrates with them. The change gives Lone a showier entry, but it also sensibly exploits the actor's training in dance and Peking Opera stagecraft.

Bertolucci explains that he always tries to breathe extra life into his scripts in this way, and Storaro confirms that spontaneous inventions have played a large part in all their films together: 'Set-ups and camera movements are part of Bertolucci, just as light and colour are parts of me. No matter how good or poor his script is, he changes it day by day, according to how he feels at that moment. If he didn't, he'd just be recording the script. For him, there is always one right way of staging and shooting a scene, and he doesn't know what it is until he gets to it. We establish the film's creative base before we start, and so changes are never a problem. As long as the foundation is solid, you can change anything, go wherever you want.'

The 'creative base' for *The Last Emperor* is quite complex. Storaro has evolved a subtle schema for the lighting, moving from the filtered half-light of the Court through a phase of extreme chiaroscuro to a harmonious balance between light and shade; he is also aiming to underline the growing maturity of Pu Yi's perspective on his own history by using a different colour

bias for each stage of his life. For his part, Nando Scarfiotti (who was a comparative latecomer to the project) gave himself a crash course in Chinese architecture and design so that he could improvise freely from a grounding in historical fact: 'The idea is that every element in the sets should be believable, but that the order in which they appear should not respect reality.' The underlying object, it emerges, is that the film should fall neatly between historical reconstruction and imaginative interpretation, and I came away from my visit to the production with a strong impression that Bertolucci's interest in Freudian psychoanalysis will loom large on the 'interpretation' side. 'We had to know everything about the reality,' says Bertolucci, 'so that every time we're unfaithful to it, it's not through ignorance but from choice.'

The retiring *deus ex machina* behind the film is the British independent producer Jeremy Thomas, who has never handled anything on this scale before. He and Bertolucci had wanted to work together for some time; Bertolucci gave him the two volumes of Pu Yi's book early in 1984, and asked him if he wanted to 'ride this tiger'. He made several trips to China to get the preliminary permissions and then raised some money to finance the writing of the script, which took a year. The original plan to make a tv mini-series was dropped and the project took shape as a 2½-hour feature. The script was approved by the Chinese authorities (bar a few factual quibbles), and the arduous search for the production budget began. Thomas eventually raised it from a consortium of banks, headed by Hill Samuel.

Thomas, who always stays with his productions from their inception right through to international release, is visibly relieved that *The Last Emperor* is going as smoothly as it is. He has nothing but praise for his Chinese hosts in the Co-production Corporation (who will end up owning the distribution rights in China) and he's not even bitter about the shortcomings of the Beijing telephone system. At the back of his mind, he's already thinking about future projects with Nicolas Roeg, David Cronenberg, Jonathan Demme and Nagisa Oshima. But there's still a long way to go with Pu Yi.

'We have sixteen weeks shooting here in China, and then five weeks of interiors in the studio in Rome. The completion date is August or September 1987, for release in October. It is a rather large project for an independent to have taken on, but major studios nowadays tend to "father" independent productions, and we're making this in the same way that a major would have done it. It costs us a bit less, because there isn't the overhead of having a large parent involved. I've pre-sold it virtually everywhere in the world, so I don't have a marketing problem—but I do have a gap between how much I've sold it for and how much it's costing . . .'



Bernard Vorhaus (second from left) at work on *The Last Journey*.

GEOFF BROWN

VORHAUS

A Director Rediscovered

BERNARD VORHAUS: I was born in New York City, December 1904.

INTERVIEWER: That's six years later than the books suggest.

VORHAUS: That's long enough ago, isn't it? How old do you want me to be?

We have much to learn about Bernard Vorhaus. It takes time and effort just to master the twists, gaps and lurches of his biography. At the age of ten or so, he comes into contact with filmmaking through his elder sister Amy, who takes him on her story-selling jaunts to the Fort Lee studios in New Jersey. Young Bernard returns to East 80th Street, Manhattan, with scraps of film which he cuts, re-edits, and runs through his toy projector. Vorhaus père urges him to join the family law firm after Harvard; Vorhaus prefers the silver screen and starts in Hollywood, in 1925, as a junior writer itching to grasp the director's megaphone. He writes for Columbia, Fox and MGM, then piles his savings into *Sunlight*, an independent silent two-reeler starring ZaSu Pitts. Placed before exhibitors in 1928 just as films start talking seriously, this has all the attractions of last week's meat. Vorhaus then uses his available funds for a holiday in England, sails into Plymouth, falls in love with the spring countryside and stays until 1937.

He toils on trifles as production supervisor for the newly formed British Talking Pictures, then steps into the twilight world of quota quickies, making seven brisk features for Julius Hagen, the ambitious impresario of Twickenham Film Studios, and four others elsewhere. He directs everything and everybody: thrillers both cunning and ebullient; a Lancashire comedy (*Cotton Queen*); an addle-pated musical with a Soho pet shop setting (*Street Song*); theatrical gents like Lewis Casson and Henry Kendall; music-hall incorrigibles like

Will Fyffe; young newcomers (Ida Lupino, aged 15); pirouetting monkeys, prancing skiers, hurtling trains.

When Hagen's empire crumbles in the financial earthquakes of 1935/7, Vorhaus is offered a contract by Herbert J. Yates in Hollywood; he accepts, only to find that Republic's treadmill is far more demanding than the one he just jumped off. By night he attends Anti-Nazi League meetings and other fraternities dedicated to the eradication of fascism. By day he directs Bobby Breen, the singing curly-headed angel; the

Cotton Queen: Jimmy Hanley, Mary Lawson.





Street Song: Rene Ray, Lawrence Hanray.



The Ghost Camera: Ida Lupino, Henry Kendall.

Ice-Capades company of skaters; Sigrid Gurie, the Nordic nothing; low-budget flotsam and jetsam.

This could have led to schizophrenia, but in 1942 Vorhaus finds relief in the US Air Force Motion Picture Unit, supervising and often directing shorts on the identification of enemy planes, the prevention of venereal disease and other niceties of war. For the US Signal Corps in 1945 he makes a documentary on the Yalta conference, but Washington insists the film be destroyed when the political climate drops to Cold War level and Vorhaus' left-wing affiliations become known. The return to commercial film-making proves difficult. Feeling that he didn't survive the war merely to direct Charles Drake on skis in *Winter Wonderland* (1947), Vorhaus takes another stab at independent production. After shooting the girls' reformatory drama *So Young So Bad* in New York, he makes some headway in Europe and is set to fulfil a handsome Italian contract when the long shadow of the House Un-American Activities Committee falls over his life. He is named during Edward Dmytryk's recantation testimony in April 1951, and after persistent bureaucratic harassment arrives once more in England.

Instead of reviving his long-forgotten British career, he decides to retreat for safety's sake to another business, flat conversion, establishing a company, Domar Properties, which buys and converts houses throughout London. There he remains, undetected, until a chance remark by David Lean during an interview for Thames Television in 1985 prides his name from obscurity. After a research session with the London phone book, Vorhaus is found alive and very well, living in one of his own converted houses in St John's Wood. His films are located by the National Film Archive, screened, and received with enough delight to warrant an Edinburgh Festival tribute last August and a National Film Theatre season last December. Old enthusiasms rekindled, the octogenarian Vorhaus starts working on a new film script—his first since 1952.

As a case-history of a film-maker buffeted by fate and history, Vorhaus' career is interesting enough. But the films themselves cry for attention and applause. In his interview, Lean had singled out Vorhaus as the director whose work he particularly admired in his days as an apprentice editor; looking at something like *The Last Journey* (1935), which creates the frenzy of a train travelling at full tilt from a mosaic of tiny shots, some one second long, we can easily appreciate Lean's pleasure. (The respect was mutual: after spotting Lean's work editing British Movietone newsreels, Vorhaus employed him as a cutter on two early thrillers, *Money for Speed* and *The Ghost Camera*.) But Vorhaus' achievement extends far beyond a flair for montage. Working at levels of the British industry where time and money were scarce but trivial material grew like weeds, Vorhaus persistently pumped cinematic life into his projects. Other quota directors, pressed for time, positioned their characters on the drawing-room sofa, shouted the misnomer 'Action!' and let the dialogue work its poison. Vorhaus varied the scene with elaborate set-ups, tracking shots, cut-in vignettes, angled compositions—anything that would turn the script into a movie, not 6,000 feet of celluloid churned out to fulfil a legal obligation.

Look at the court scene in *The Ghost Camera* (1933), where the commonplace shots of judge, defendant and jury are fiercely resisted: John Mills, accused of murder, staggers down the aisle to subjective camerawork; the judge, Felix Aylmer, lays out the incriminating evidence in a battery of intense close-ups; the jury voices its decision off-screen while a clerk covers his pencil drawing of Mills with prison bars. Look, too, at the abundant location shooting, periodically rooting these extravagant tales in the reality of rural England (*The Ghost Camera*), the stations, tracks and rolling stock of the Great Western Railway (*The Last Journey*), the Austrian Alps (*Dusty Ermine*), the pleasure

gardens of Manchester and Blackpool (*Cotton Queen*).*

Vorhaus benefited as much as his stories from the spice and fresh air of location shooting. Working conditions at Twickenham were particularly grueling. Shooting schedules were frequently no longer than ten days, and the studio boiled with activity, in different shifts, for 24 hours. Cameras were forced to pause, however, when trains rattled by outside—a watchman was positioned on the studio roof expressly to give the floor advance warning. Some of the Twickenham staff rivalled the trains in nuisance value. Hagen's story editor Harry Fowler Mear, Vorhaus recalls, regularly provided lethal scripts peppered with stock gags culled from his own personal joke books; while the musical director, W. L. Trytel, plastered the films with sentimental, repetitive music regardless of a scene's mood or structure (listen, if you dare, to his score for *Dusty Ermine*).

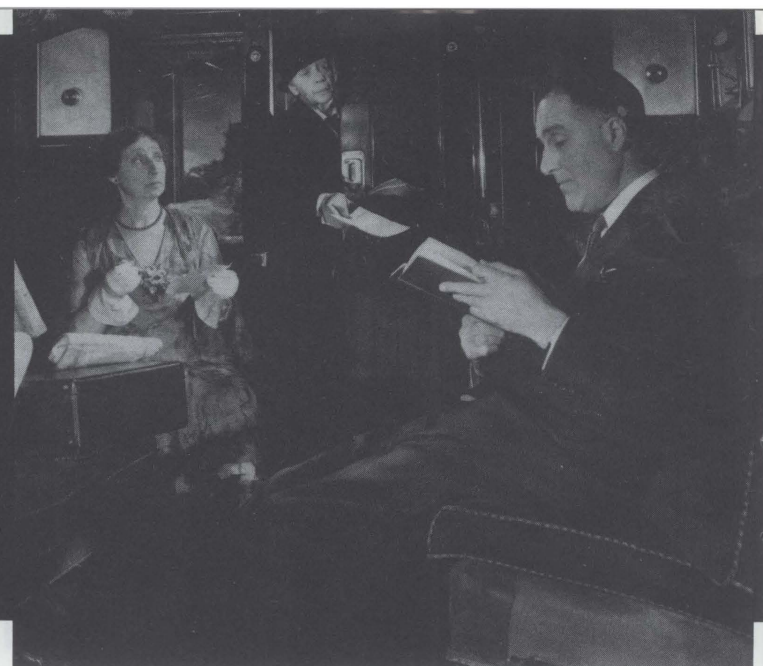
Yet Vorhaus has only the fondest memories of the technicians who battled alongside him. 'They really tried to make good films—the cameramen and their helpers, the sound crews, the grips. And the property man was expected to provide whatever was needed in the way of special effects—cobwebs, icicles, glass you could crash through harmlessly, elaborate explosions. Those poor devils, they were worked to death. And once a year Julius Hagen showed largesse and invited the staff to an enormous feast at the Savoy, which they could not possibly consume. They drank and ate as much as they possibly could, and more, and were sick all over the place. This to me was a very sad thing.'

Vorhaus also recalls with pleasure the performers, often lured from London theatres to add lustre to otherwise

*Had he taken directorial control of *Broken Blossoms* (1936), as was mooted, Vorhaus would have taken the cameras to the decaying splendours of Limehouse. Watching the project become entombed in studio sets and soft-focus photography was one of the most frustrating experiences in his career. Vorhaus served as technical supervisor; Hans (later John) Brahm directed.



Crime on the Hill: Anthony Bushell.



The Last Journey: Viola Compton, Sydney Fairbrother, Godfrey Tearle.

modest films. *Crime on the Hill* (1933), a sinuous country-house murder mystery, boasted a cast list that any West End management would envy: Phyllis Dare, the musical comedy star, as the secret wife of a murdered country squire; Lewis Casson as the vicar sniffing out the mystery; Sir Nigel Playfair, guiding light of the Lyric, Hammersmith, as the doctor who dunit out of unrequited love. Elsewhere, filmgoers could enjoy Henry Kendall, epitome of the man about Mayfair, peering over horn-rimmed glasses as the offhand amateur detective in *The Ghost Camera*; tragedian Godfrey Tearle as the brain specialist in *The Last Journey*, who soothes the driver's savage mind just before his train hits the buffer stops; the revue comedian Nelson Keys; S. Victor Stanley, from the cast of *Journey's End*.

To their parts such players brought polish, a firm posture and a clear, decisive enunciation designed to bounce off the theatre balcony. Listen to Henry Kendall telling Ida Lupino's blonde, secretive heroine, 'You see, I happen to know'—stretching the word as though it were a foot stuck in glue. In *Dusty Ermine* (1936), listen to Anthony Bushell, answering Jane Baxter's petulant query, 'Who do you think you are?' with his bellicose cry, 'I have every reason to suppose I'm Inspector Forsyth of Scotland Yard!' These are the cadences of prewar Shaftesbury Avenue, preserved in celluloid like flies in amber.

In a film like *Dusty Ermine*, where artifice hangs heavy and the plot straggles, Bushell's hectoring performance stands uncomfortably naked. But in *The Last Journey*, the stage luminaries slot into place, like everything else, with delightful precision. This is undoubtedly Vorhaus' finest achievement among the British films uncovered so far. The basic plot is simple. A veteran train driver, unwillingly facing retirement and believing his stoker enamoured of his wife, gleefully courts death and destruction by letting the 3.07 to Mulchester speed past all signals and stations. On board, as expected, are

romantic couples, miscreants, eccentrics and deceivers: among them a young girl just married to a confidence trickster, a lady littering the train with 'Evils of Drink' leaflets (a character snatched from *Twentieth Century*?), a detective in disguise and Godfrey Tearle's brain specialist.

Vorhaus packs an incredible amount into 66 minutes, and the train's crescendo is expertly charted, from the first lurch felt in the dining car, through the affray at intermediate stations, to a droll near-miss with a dawdling goods train. The girl's jilted fiancé is also at large in the narrative, pursuing his heart's delight by fast car; when that proves nowhere near fast enough, he commandeers a light plane at a convenient airfield. As a technical achievement alone, *The Last Journey* is impressive. Twickenham Studios were using back projection for the first time, yet there is none of the Hornby train set feeling we often get with vintage British screen trickery. By keeping the action locked within the carriages and only venturing outside for specific location effects, Vorhaus generates considerable claustrophobia and tension. In the words of the *Variety* critic reviewing the film from London, this is a 'thrilling popular entertainment for the masses'; the paper's New York correspondent who wrote about a 'maudlin potpourri in a runaway rattler' must have been watching a different film.

Other films besides *The Last Journey* received some American distribution, and Herbert J. Yates was sufficiently impressed by his ability to get good results on low budgets that he invited Vorhaus to do the same at Republic. 'I didn't know at the time what a treadmill Republic was,' Vorhaus recalls, 'or maybe I would have made more of an effort to go somewhere else.' But there were compensations in Hollywood's burgeoning political scene. Like many of his generation, Vorhaus' political conscience was first stirred by the Spanish Civil War; he played an active part in

Hollywood's anti-fascist organisations, joining the Anti-Nazi League, the League of American Writers, attending cause parties at swimming pools. Some of his political friendships spilled over into his film work. At a time when the Screen Writers Guild was fighting bloody battles with the major studios, Republic secured some of their most notable members at low salaries by silently accepting the Guild's contract demands. From the beginning, Vorhaus' Hollywood films were written by left-wing activists (and future witch-hunt victims)—among them Samuel Ornitz, Ring Lardner Jr (both members of the Hollywood Ten), Ian McLellan Hunter, Guy Endore, Gordon Kahn, Francis Edward Faragoh.

Occasionally their studio tasks vaguely echoed the passions that filled their leisure hours. In the period musical *Way Down South* (1939), co-written at Vorhaus' urging by Langston Hughes, a leading figure in the Harlem renaissance, the egregious Bobby Breen was enlisted in the fight against slavery and surrounded by Negro spirituals. *The Courageous Dr Christian* (1940), written by Lardner and Hunter, found Jean Hersholt's kindly doctor (initially popular on radio) taking up the cause of shanty-town squatters prey to disease. In *Three Faces West* (1940), Samuel Ornitz supplied Vorhaus with a subject far above the level of most Republic scripts: the intertwined fates of dust-bowl migrants and an emigrant doctor sheltering from Nazi persecution. Unfortunately production went ahead before the script was fully developed (no doubt Republic were painfully aware of Fox's *Grapes of Wrath* baying at their heels); and the thematic link between America's pioneers and the new immigrants from Nazified Europe is not made clear enough. The production also proceeded with a motley cast: John Wayne as the spokesman farmer; Sigrid Gurie, formerly Sam Goldwyn's 'Siren of the Fjords', as the unconvincing love interest—daughter to Charles Coburn's Viennese doctor with a wobbly accent.



The Spiritualist: Richard Carlson, Cathy O'Donnell, Lynn Bari.



So Young So Bad.

Although Vorhaus' Hollywood films suffered sometimes from miscast players and botched material, many took on an extra visual appeal with John Alton's photography. They worked together on *The Courageous Dr. Christian*, Alton's first American feature as a cameraman after varied experience in Paris and Argentina; Vorhaus helped Alton secure a Republic contract and used him thereafter whenever possible. Alton creates magic moments in *Three Faces West*, *Ice-Capades Revue* and *Affairs of Jimmy Valentine* (a highly polished thriller with a well observed small-town setting). But their finest hour together, on the available evidence, was *The Spiritualist*, released in 1948, and the last film Vorhaus shot in Hollywood.

The very first shots plunge us into the delirious dream universe beloved of 1940s psychological thrillers. The wind whips round a cliff-top mansion; Lynn Bari stares out at the sea from the balcony, hair billowing. A menacing shadowed figure approaches from behind, holding what might be a gun. But Alton and Vorhaus are already playing games: the shadow is no more than Cathy O'Donnell, Bari's silly kid sister, clutching a fan. Bari's husband, we're told, was burned to death in a car crash two years ago. She now spends her days mooning, and pacing an extraordinary set—made to look far more extensive than it is through Alton's plush folds of darkness, pinpricked by candles or light from distant doors.

At first it seems the dramatic weight rests on Bari's entrapment by Turhan Bey's Alexis—a phony spiritualist of unctuous tones, rarely seen without his attendant crow. But after Alexis arranges a seance to bring widow and dear departed together, the spiritualist is trumped by an even bigger trickster—the departed himself, a bigamist and murderer now trying his hand at blackmail. 'It was the silliest story,' Vorhaus rightly admits, 'but it intrigued me because in Hollywood at that time every corner going to Santa Monica housed some spurious church, with a man who

either called back the spirits of the dead or gave massages combining spiritual hopes with physical pleasures—the craziest things.'

Finally tired of Hollywood silliness, Vorhaus struggled to find a suitable project for independent production. The result, in 1950, was *So Young So Bad*—the only film, the director claims, that emerged more or less as he wanted, despite difficult shooting conditions in New York and the necessity to post-synchronise the soundtrack. Edward J. and Harry Lee Danziger, hotel owners just starting as producers, provided finance; United Artists distributed the film as a first feature, with much commercial success. Its artistic success, however, now seems jeopardised by an uneasy mixture of the earnest and the lurid. The drama unfolds at the Elmview Corrective School for Girls, and to play its most troublesome inmates, Vorhaus chose new faces: Anne Francis, Anne Jackson, Rosita (later Rita) Moreno and Enid Pulver (the only one who slipped back into obscurity). As the enlightened polo-necked, pipe-smoking psychiatrist, Paul Henreid makes all the right reformist noises, viewing his charges as casualties of their environment and fighting the school's disciplinarian ways. But in his desire for the vivid scene and the strong indictment, Vorhaus gets almost as carried away as his stock cruel matron, Mrs Beuhler, who stamps on a forbidden rabbit, pops the corpse into an incinerator, and repeatedly trains a water hose on the girls who rebelled with a dormitory fire.

Perhaps with time Vorhaus would have found subtler ways of aiming his serious subjects at the marketplace, but he was never allowed the chance. After two continental ventures with United Artists' backing—*Pardon My French* (an English language version of a French comedy) and *Fanciulle di Lusso* (a tale of puppy love at a Swiss finishing school), his troubles began. The American Projectionists' Union threatened to black all United Artists product if the company released any further Vorhaus

film; *Fanciulle di Lusso* (known as *Luxury Girls* in the States) was thus released with the director hiding behind the name of Piero Mussetta. Vorhaus believes the main reason for his harassment was his membership of organisations deemed by HUAC to be Communist fronts. But the years spent with the Air Force Motion Picture Unit complicated his position further: as production supervisor, top secret documents on technical developments in aircraft facilities and radar had passed through his hands. (The Security Officer for the post at the time was Ronald Reagan; the two had regularly driven to work together, though their friendship never survived the Unit nor Reagan's subsequent about-turn to the right.)

Deeply worried about the possibilities if he were subpoenaed, Vorhaus opted for the inconspicuous life. He fell into the flat conversion business after the experience of converting his own house on Primrose Hill; and this second career is not as incongruous as it may at first appear. Vorhaus only achieved his stylish effects on low-budget films through extensive planning and imaginative marshalling of available resources. The resources simply switched from scripts, actors and limited money to bricks, mortar and limited floor space.

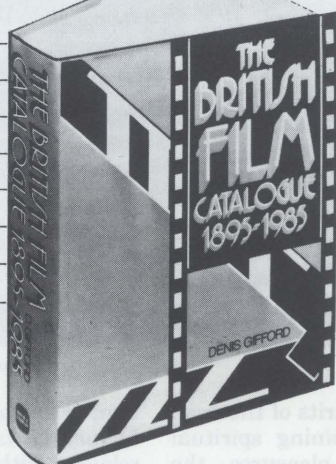
Vorhaus looks back on his curtailed film career with sadness, but no bitterness. 'For one thing, I'd seen people far worse off than me. I was lucky in finding this alternative work, which was quite profitable, and mildly interesting. And I thought the political implications of the investigations and the blacklist were much more important than the question of a few hurt individuals. But I must say I regret now having given in to the pressure—making films is much more exciting than anything else you can do. And I know, even today at my age, I'd make them much better than I used to.' After a film career riddled with frustrations, Vorhaus remains in part the boy of ten, discovering the joys of making movies by running film scraps through his toy projector. ■

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Silly Girls

1 Marie Rivière (Anne),
La Femme de l'Aviateur.

2 Anne-Laure Meury (Lucie),
La Femme de l'Aviateur.

3 Béatrice Romand (Sabine),
Arielle Dombasle (Clarisse),
Le Beau Mariage.

4 Amanda Langlet (Pauline),
Pauline à la Plage.

5 Pascale Ogier (Louise),
Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune.

6 Marie Rivière (Delphine),
Le Rayon Vert.

July in Paris: at two weeks' notice, Delphine, a secretary, learns that the girl with whom she was to have gone on holiday to Greece has backed out. Whereas *Pauline à la Plage* centred on a whirlpool of holiday romances, *Le Rayon Vert*, the latest release in Eric Rohmer's series 'Comedies and Proverbs',* concerns one girl's avoidance of a casual summer affair. Delphine is in acute confusion. She has been in love three

**La Femme de l'Aviateur* (1980), *Le Beau Mariage* (1981), *Pauline à la Plage* (1982), *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune* (1984) and *Le Rayon Vert* (1985). A new addition to the Comedies and Proverbs, *L'Ami de Mon Amie*, has been completed; and there are possibly two or three more to come. Rohmer's 'Moral Tales' (1963-73) ran to six features.

JOHN PYM

times, has even had a fiancé, but she cannot settle. Her friends are all helpful, suggesting places to stay and possible companions. But the more they suggest, the more defensive and impossible to please she becomes. Hers is the classic muddle of a Rohmer heroine.

Rohmer's novel solution to Delphine's bind is to take her on a tour of unsatisfactory holiday spots (at one mountain resort, she has time only for a short walk before she loses heart and is back on the

Paris train) and then to free her by magic. Delphine (Marie Rivière) has, she believes, an affinity with the colour green. Tarot cards appear significantly in her path. At Biarritz she overhears a conversation between a group of women and a sagelike older man on the subject of Jules Verne's story *The Green Ray*. Later, at a railway station, Delphine makes the acquaintance of a sincere, good-looking young man, a cabinet-maker named Jacques; she visits his home town, St-Jean-de-Luz, and there, with Jacques at her side, wills herself to see the 'green ray', the last colour of the setting sun, which, as Verne predicted, finally allows her to read her own feelings correctly.

It is reported that Rohmer tried to photograph this rare sunset phenomenon, but was in the end compelled to add the effect in the laboratory. Nevertheless, technically produced or not, when the green ray flashes the sense of relief for Delphine and the audience is unbounded. Not often has the director allowed himself such an unguarded upbeat closing shot; and not often has he solved a heroine's dilemma so unambiguously. Rohmer usually leaves his young characters with their problems teasingly unresolved.

The older generation, those over 30 or thereabouts, are not much in evidence in the Comedies and Proverbs. One adult who does get a look in, however, is the antique dealer Madame Cador; and the film in which she appears, *Le Beau Mariage*, contains one sequence which epitomises the distinctive sympathies of the series' now 66-year-old writer-director. The young and all their trying habits exercise an immense fascination for Rohmer. And yet, and yet...

Sabine, who at 20-odd has set her heart on marriage, and she will brook no delay, divides her time between Paris, where she studies art history, and Le Mans, where she works in Mme Cador's shop. Mme Cador, a mature lady in furs, departs for a few days leaving Sabine in charge of the business. Sabine has fixed her sights on a lawyer, the courteous Edmond, not quite a member of the older generation, with all his choices made, though edging dangerously in that direction. He is an amateur collector of Jersey porcelain. In Madame's absence, Sabine loses no time in driving Edmond to the home of one of her clients, a Countess.

The Countess wishes to sell a Jersey porcelain jug: Mme Cador has professed indifference, the price being too high. Edmond watches with amused interest as Sabine swiftly beats down the Countess, who is caught offguard by the girl's ruthlessness, and buys the jug on his behalf. He is pleased, but her suit, inevitably, is not advanced. Later, an icy Mme Cador (Huguette Faget) returns to the shop and with supreme adult condescension tears a strip off Sabine for her impropriety: for in fact, though of course she does not say so, using a cunning adult stratagem to part the Countess from her property. Personable young assistants are for decorative tone, not poaching business.

This is too much for poor Sabine (Béatrice Romand), who already knows in her heart that she will never make Edmond want to marry her. She snaps back at her employer—What hypocrisy! Mme Cador had no interest in the chiselling Countess' jug—then gathers her hat and coat and sweeps out. Life for the young, Rohmer proposes, while knowing just how Mme Cador feels, is a catalogue of injustice. The only thing for it is that characteristic habit of several of his heroines: a look of fatigued exasperation, the lips in a moue, and a slight exhalation of breath—'pouff'.

This said, Rohmer has no illusions

about Sabine and in the course of the film runs a ruler over most of her shortcomings. She is muddled, to be sure, but the muddle is on the whole self-made and in the end not terribly becoming. Having ditched one man, a married painter, she ostentatiously picks another, his opposite, as if to spite herself for her foolish first choice. She then prematurely congratulates herself on deftly edging Edmond towards the altar. But he guesses her game from the start, her cunning being in fact transparent, and kindly but firmly extricates himself: he might perhaps have done her more good if he had been a little less considerate. When she is incapable of letting go, the muddle deepens. The more Sabine tangles the bedsheets, the harder it becomes to fall asleep, the more her childish anger grows.

To underline her tiresomeness, Rohmer gives Sabine sensible friends and a sympathetic family. Clarisse, the lampmaker round the corner from Mme Cador, even goes so far as to offer Sabine a job in her craft workshop: for another aspect of Sabine's muddle is that she cannot, with many a sigh, make up her mind what to do with what is left of her life. Sabine's widowed mother, who also has a younger daughter to bring up, is in the circumstances a model of discretion. An old boyfriend, whom Sabine visits in his plain modern flat, will not rise to her provocation: he is happy with his marriage and his job as a teacher. All this workaday normality, however, only aggravates Sabine's inability to settle.

So, why should we care about Sabine? When measured against the other heroines of the Comedies and Proverbs—Pauline, on her Normandy beach; Anne, the aviator's mistress; Louise, under the Paris full moon; and Delphine in search of the elusive green ray—she is, one is forced to conclude, the silliest of that bunch of silly girls (Pauline excluded) on whom Eric Rohmer, the one-time teacher, has so lovingly bestowed his attention over the past six years.

Consider first the credits. Each of the Comedies and Proverbs is around 100 minutes long. The films are all produced by Margaret Ménégoz for Les Films du Losange, with Les Films du Carrosse and Les Films Ariane coming in on three of them. With the exception of *Le Rayon Vert*, which was cut by Maria-Luisa Garcia, they have all been edited by Cécile Decugis. Georges Prat has been the favoured soundman, though Claudine Nougaret recorded *Le Rayon Vert*, and Dominique Hennequin has been the sound mixer throughout. The most variable technical credit has been the cameraman: Bernard Lutic photographed *La Femme de l'Aviateur* and *Le Beau Mariage*, Nestor Almendros *Pauline à la Plage*, Renato Berta *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune* and Sophie Maintigneux *Le Rayon Vert*. It is, one imagines, a tight outfit (and the preponderance of women is surely notable); and like other small faithful independent teams (Woody Allen's comes to mind), it knows very well how to

repeat itself, with variations.

The series' economy of means is exemplary. The *International Herald Tribune* (15 September 1986) reported that *Le Rayon Vert* cost 2m francs (about \$298,500), doubled by editing and promotion costs, which is roughly one-third the price of an average European feature film, and was virtually paid for before the theatrical release by the sale of rights to the United States and to the Canal Plus cable network. Public locations are used to maximum effect: there is, for example, in *Le Rayon Vert*, a breathtaking high shot of the beach at Biarritz. A simple establishing shot? No, with a deft turn, the beach, carpeted with oblivious sunbathers, becomes the elegant counterpoint to Delphine's misery at having to take a holiday alone. Except for *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune*, on which the actress Pascale Ogier was credited for the design (and for her own costumes), none of the Comedies and Proverbs has a named art director: Rohmer presumably has firm views about how he wishes his locations altered and dressed, and sees no virtue in employing someone to confirm them.

The Comedies and Proverbs have a unified look, the more remarkable for having been photographed by several experienced independent hands. This is partly a matter of repetition and technical consistency. The plots are neat, pared and symmetrical, and the symmetry is sometimes underlined, as in *Pauline à la Plage* and *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune*, by matching opening and closing moments. Close observers will note that conversations are invariably framed in the same way: the camera, the just observer, neither too remote nor too close. Buildings, architectural features, pieces of sculpture, beach scenes and the occasional vista are all caught with a singular exactitude. One always, it seems, enters a scene with the action in full swing.

'I am following the principles which have always guided me,' Rohmer has said, 'those of the New Wave.' Less is invariably best; except when it comes to conversation, which is allowed to run and run. Rohmer knows exactly how to place an actor on a Paris street alive with real people (or people at any rate who do not appear to be extras), and exactly the length of time such punctuating shots merit. He can film a street conversation, with a couple walking towards a backing handheld camera, with the ease which makes any utterly professional undertaking, however ordinary, worth watching. As a young man, Godard made one marvel at the naturalness with which he shot such a simple act as ordering a coffee at a zinc-topped bar. Rohmer, all these years later, can still hold one with the simple act of two girls ordering lunch in a crowded snack-bar (*La Femme de l'Aviateur*).

What, then, is Rohmer driving at in the Comedies and Proverbs? And why is he so well disposed towards the silly girls? Comparing this series with the 'Moral Tales', he told André Séailles (*Etudes Cinématographiques*, No 146/8)

that there is a difference of emphasis rather than of kind. 'In each I wanted to show the human heart as well as manners and morals. But in the Moral Tales, there is an ethical judgment formulated by certain characters who, through their commentary, lecture the others on morality. In the Comedies and Proverbs, however, such moralising characters have disappeared. Why? I changed the subject, or rather the tone. Morality emerges literally from the behaviour of the characters, who reveal themselves by their actions or passions, their impulses or illusions, by the vertigo born in the heart or the senses, and above all by the gap that appears between their words and their deeds.'

Rohmer borrowed the generic title 'Comedies and Proverbs' from de Musset and Mme de Ségur: 'with the ironic and slightly offhand connotation of a drawing-room comedy.' His heroines are caught 'at a moment of passage between youth and maturity.' 'That's what interests me,' Rohmer told the *Herald Tribune*. 'Someone who has lived 25 years has ten years of sentimental life behind them. At that age, choices must be made in every domain.'

The heroines of the Comedies and Proverbs are not career girls. Some have jobs, or at least part-time jobs. They dabble in 'design'. We glimpse them in

offices, on the telephone, fixing or calling off dates. They attend to files. But this is not for them real life. Nor indeed, except for Louise, in *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune*, who is obsessed with the notion of a room of her own, do they really pay much attention to where they live. They often seem to inhabit neat, uncluttered single rooms with alcove kitchens. They primp over their clothes and fuss over their hair no more than ordinary middle-class girls the world over.

What really occupies them—and where the choices are really made—are affairs of the heart. He loves me, he loves me not; and if 'not' why not, endlessly, round and round. The affairs, or the imagined affairs, of the Comedies and Proverbs intertwine and cross over, to marvellously comic effect. *Pauline à la Plage*, the most intricately worked-up of the series, is shaped as high farce; *La Femme de l'Aviateur*, with its 'mystery' which the post-office sorter, the puppyish François, must unravel, is a junior detective story. But in each the principal motive force is a peculiarly ridiculous vision of sentimental love, love at twenty (sometimes offset by visions of love at fifteen and thirty): he loves me too much, not enough, enough but in not quite the right way; he loves someone else, perhaps he loves someone else . . . The self-absorption is staggering.

Rohmer yields the floor to these creatures. He catches their every inflection and he draws radiant performances from his actresses (and again one thinks of Woody Allen). Marie Rivière, Rosette, Béatrice Romand, Virginie Thévenet and Arielle Dombasle thread their way through the series in various guises, while Anne-Laure Meury (the detective of *La Femme de l'Aviateur*) and Amanda Langlet (Pauline) appear only once, giving perhaps, like Bresson's heroines, first performances by which they will always be remembered.

Rohmer serves them their just deserts. Delphine of *Le Rayon Vert* is rewarded with the green ray and (presumably) her handsome cabinet-maker. Louise, however, the trainee designer of *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune*, gets her comeuppance. She concludes that life in a room of her own, even a room decorated just so, is empty. Early one morning she contritely returns to the house in the Paris suburbs that she shares with Rémi, a town planner (Rohmer's men usually have proper jobs), only to discover the bed unslept in and Rémi having fallen in love not with the girl she suspected but with her best friend.

Does this, however, bring us any closer to understanding why Anne, Sabine, Louise and Delphine transcend their silliness? Pauline and Lucie (Anne-Laure Meury, the junior detective) are

Le Rayon Vert: Vincent Gauthier (Jacques), Marie Rivière (Delphine).



the adolescent exceptions who prove the rule that once a girl gets to twenty, unless she takes care, she will become temporarily addle-pated, until she surrenders her youth and shoulders the tedious burdens of adulthood. Pauline and Lucie have the freshness of precocious childhood; the other heroines, all in their various ways equally vital, have a different and somehow more touching quality. They are in the very last moments of their lives before choices have to be made: these are for them the last days of summer.

If these girls were characters in a modern American picture, they might be discovered ten years on at some melancholy, contrived reunion in which old liaisons would be mulled over and everyone would feel sorry for himself. Rohmer prefers to give them their moment, and to allow them the fizz of their self-absorption. What makes them so watchable is that they do, genuinely, live in the present: they may fret about the past, their ten years of sentimental life, but they do not fear the future. Indeed, it never really crosses their minds that the future—the responsibilities of the antique shop—will ever dawn. Rohmer catches them in those last transcendent moments when everything is possible. He gives them to us on their own terms; refusing, as he says, to practise 'the spirit of clumsiness: didacticism.'

'I remain constant in my taste for a well-constructed storyline, for intrigue, psychology and drama,' Rohmer told André Séailles. 'To people who have told me that these are not the things that go into cinema, I have often replied that the situations I have known in real life are situations in which *people speak*. Those in which people do not speak are the exceptions.' For *Le Rayon Vert*, Marie Rivière (Delphine) receives a dialogue credit, which is to say that a great deal of her chatter is improvised around the director's careful plot. The talk is very talkative, even by Rohmer's standards. But one wonders sometimes—there is, for example, a wonderfully inconsequential lunchtime conversation on vegetarianism—if it is not deep down merely something of a display of pyrotechnics. Witty, entertaining, French—but also hot air. In drawing-room comedies, the repartee is more precise. Characters talk to each other; but when, as often happens, they launch into abstractions, one feels they might just as well be talking to themselves. All this talk of love, when it comes right down to it, means very little. It is a fantasy, an agreeable, endless, excuse-me dance. Reality is in fact, regrettably, Mme Cadot's antique business. How much more agreeable, though, to see the flash of green on the horizon of the sea and to allow these silly girls their last flash of youthful brilliance. ■

Le Rayon Vert opens in London in February, at the same time as a season of Eric Rohmer's films at the National Film Theatre.

David Robinson

ELOQUENT SILENTS

Pordenone and Avignon

The revolution in the appreciation of the cinema's past can probably be dated from 1980 and the revival of *Napoleon*. The film made it into *Variety*'s box office charts: silent films were taken out of the rarified air of cineclubs and cinémathèques and back to the theatres and the big audience. No longer is it possible to be content with the endlessly duped and scratched prints that were painfully worshipped in film society days. Now the aim is to approximate the original image quality, by meticulous printing from the best preserved prints and negatives, by restoring where possible the original tinting and toning. There is new scholarship in the restoration or recreation of orchestral accompaniments for silent films.

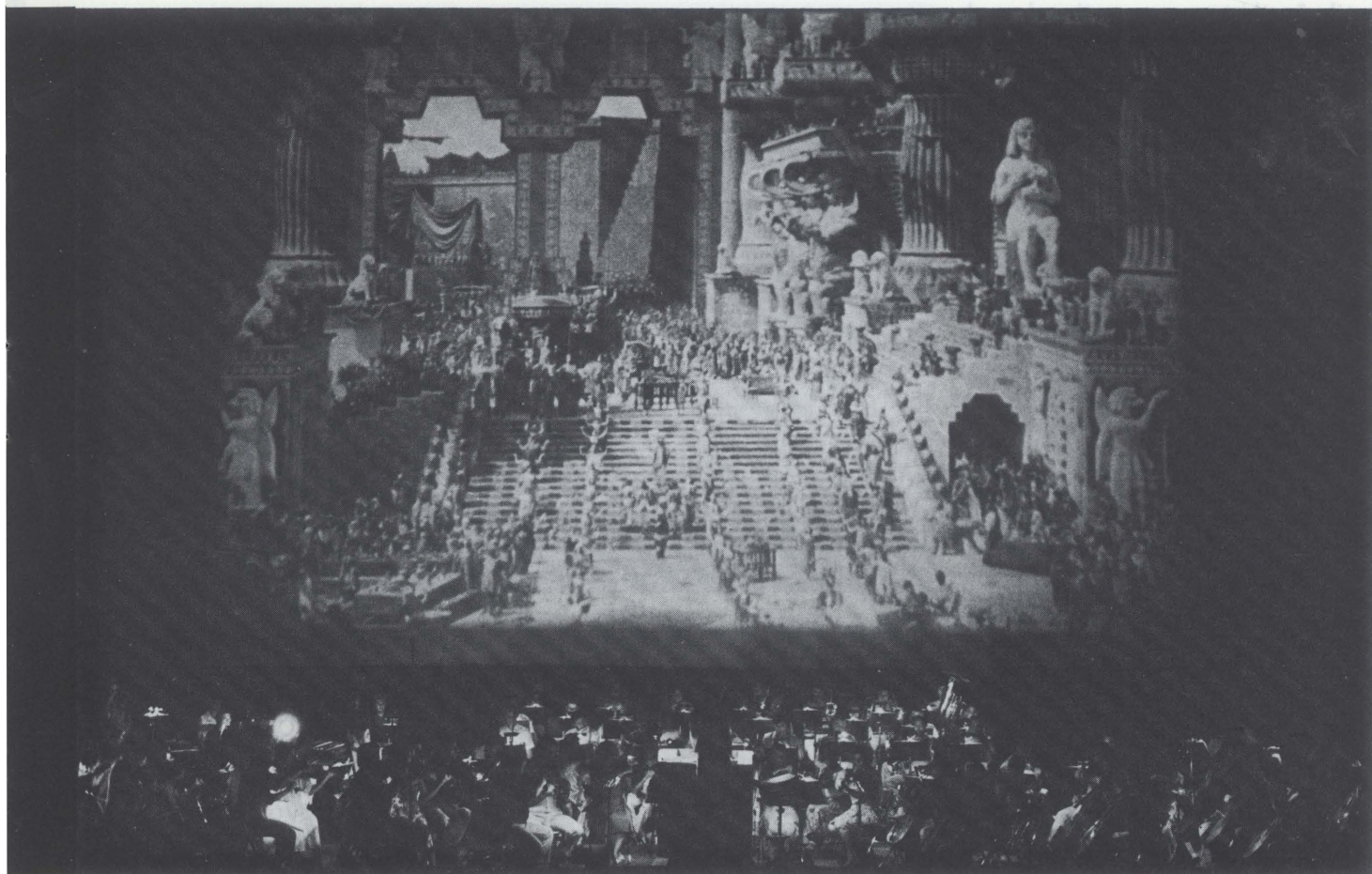
All this is dramatically changing perception of the cinema's past. The old tendency was to see the first forty years as an evolutionary period, a slow progression from archaic primitivism through imperfection to the first realisation, somewhere in the mid-1930s, of a complete film art acceptable enough to be revived on tv (the public repository of the cinema's past). Apart perhaps from a few comedies, anything before that was quaint, archaic and fit only for condescending laughter or (*Intolerance*, *Potemkin*, *Greed*, etc) no less deadly reverence. Now, after an interval of sixty years, we are once again beginning to see silent films as they were meant to be seen.

An important aspect of this reflation of the past is the rise of the new retrospective festivals—Le Giornate del

Cinema Muto in Pordenone, the annual *colloque* of the Institut Jean Vigo in Perpignan (in 1986 devoted to a homage to Louis Feuillade) and the Rencontres Cinématographiques within the Avignon Festival. In 1985, Pordenone resurrected the pre-First World War Italian comedy; and in December 1986, the new Association Française de Recherche sur l'Histoire du Cinéma followed suit by dedicating its first Journées du Cinéma Muet to the French comic cinema of 1908-14.

Pordenone is the biggest event of the kind, deploying its small subventions with remarkable flair and courage. In only five years, it has grown from a local affair in this small North Italian town into a major international event, attracting 250 or more scholars and historians as well as the local audience. The festival was created by a group of young, gifted and unpaid enthusiasts who started out in cineclubs, and embarked on more ambitious exhibition ventures when they organised a travelling cinema to supply the communities which lost their theatres in the disastrous Friuli earthquake of 1976.

In an accompanying article, John Gillett writes about the revelations of the panorama of early Scandinavian cinema which was the central theme of the 1986 festival. Pordenone is no rest cure. There is a minimum twelve hours of projections a day, most of them accompanied by the indefatigable resident pianist Maestro Carlo Moser, whose improvisations have an uncanny ability to anticipate the action of films he is seeing



Intolerance at Avignon. Photo: Georges Méran.

for the first time. As well as this, Pordenone offered video screenings, exhibitions, homages to Linder, to Méliès, to Carmine Gallone on his centenary, to the pioneer Italian cameraman Giovanni Vitrotti and to the Cinémathèque Française and the Directors Guild of America, both celebrating their fiftieth anniversaries. The Giornate has also inaugurated a prize for 'activities in safeguarding and prizing the cinematographic patrimony', whose first deserving recipients were Kevin Brownlow and David Gill.

Pordenone screened two remarkable musical discoveries. Not only, it appears, were musical scores specially composed or compiled for films, but in a few cases films were composed and choreographed to music. One of the earliest examples was *Histoire d'un Pierrot*, directed in 1913-14 by Count Baldassare Neroni for Celio Film. The pantomime by Fernand Beissier with music by Mario Costa had been first produced at the Teatro al Metastasio, Rome, in 1893, and remained a stage favourite in the intervening twenty years. In purely cinematic terms the film is wholly backward-looking for its time. Apart from one or two close-ups, Neroni chose to use the screen like a head-on stage proscenium and filmed in lengthy static shots. In that sense, it is more remarkable as a meticulous record of a nineteenth century stage production than as a film. The performers however are remarkable—a young and fresh Francesca Bertini, before she had acquired the diva airs that make her later

performances at once so fascinating and so absurd; Emilio Ghione, Bertini's usual partner at that period; and the 21-year-old Lya Gys in her first considerable film role. Above all, the response of the pantomime to the music gives *Histoire d'un Pierrot* an extraordinary life and charm.

The orchestral score had been rematched to the film by Italian Swiss Television, which was also responsible for recreating an even more remarkable example of the early musical film. This was *Rapsodia Satanica*, directed in 1915 by Nino Oxilia and Fausto Maria Martini and now reunited with the original symphonic accompaniment by Pietro Mascagni. The full score is lost, but Carlo Piccardi succeeded in recreating it from the parts and newly synchronising it to the film. Oxilia was killed at the front in 1917 at the age of 28; but it is clear that he could have become one of Italy's great film-makers. Starting as a dramatist, he brought to films a broad culture, which did not encumber his feeling for image and rhythm. *Rapsodia Satanica* stars Lyda Borelli as an old woman who longs to be young again. Mephistopheles grants her wish, on condition that she will forever forswear love. Inevitably, with youth and beauty restored to her, she is unable to keep her side of the bargain. This magical, seventy-year-old masterpiece reappears as revelation of an art that is neither ballet nor film as we now know it, but something in between, and separate—perhaps having more to do with dreams than with waking experience.

Avignon honoured the seventieth anniversary of *Intolerance* with a series of performances accompanied by a new symphonic score by Antoine Duhamel and Pierre Jansen, performed by the 75-piece Orchestre de l'Île de France under Jacques Mercier. In all these years the film can never have had a more impressive theatre than was provided by the Cour d'Honneur of the Papal Palace. The soaring medieval walls seemed a natural extension of Griffith's visions of Ancient Babylon, Judaea and the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day. The print used was reconstituted by Raymond Rohauer from Griffith's personal copy, complete with the original colour tinting. On a screen forty feet high, the images had the depth and clarity of a brand new film, and held capacity audiences of 2,500 a time spell-bound.

Avignon's main event was a panorama of world cinema between 1915 and 1920, screening upwards of forty films which revealed a period of extraordinary vitality. It is not possible here to detail all the revelations: one of the major rediscoveries, however, turned out to be André Antoine (1858-1945). It is exactly a hundred years since Antoine established his first company and began the reforms that were permanently to change the theatre throughout the world. Strangely, his brief but no less brilliant career in cinema has been all but forgotten. He was nearing sixty when he turned his attention to the new art, with a thrilling renewal of excitement: 'Believe me, I have been a fool to

battle for thirty years creating decors! Now the cinema doesn't care a damn: it says to me, "You naive old thing, what did you expect! Me—I'll make you act plays in Nature, in reality . . ." He demonstrated his point in eight films whose qualities have nothing 'theatrical' about them, but come from Antoine's ability to perceive the fundamentals of a form.

Antoine himself was disarmingly deprecatory: 'I arrived in the cinema in complete ignorance of this job. It was a bit presumptuous, but in exchange I brought eyes that were quite new, with no preconceptions. Only curiosity and the desire to do well. It is exactly the same state of mind as when I assaulted the theatre in 1887, without ever having been a professional. The little evolution [in the theatre] with which people like to credit me consisted purely of watching what went on; trying, if it were possible, to be more simple and more logical. Alas! I didn't have the same fortune in the cinema. You cannot start over again and I am too old; but I saw plainly what it would be necessary to do; and the task will be a wonderful one for whoever will undertake it.'

Avignon showed his version of Zola's *La Terre*. On stage, Antoine had himself played Père Fouan, a rural Lear whose children drive him out after he has divided his property among them. His film, unsparingly portraying a greedy and rapacious peasantry, is decades ahead of its time in the extraordinary realism achieved by the performances and use of location, and above all in its relation of the characters to the environment, as in the death of Fouan, dwarfed in a vast winter landscape. Antoine anticipates not only the Soviets, but also Vigo and Fellini.



W. S. Van Dyke's *The Lady of the Dugout* (1918).

Avignon presented a mystery film—one of the rare pictures of the period which dealt with great political affairs. Speculatively titled *Bolshevism*, the film is a polished dramatic piece about aristocratic Russians robbed and abused by the Bolsheviks and eventually emigrating to Turkey. For the present, it remains one of the enigmas of cinema history. There is every sign that it was made in a well-equipped studio by people who had personally experienced the traumas of emigration; but no clue has yet emerged to indicate who they were or where they made their film.

By 1918 it was very clear that the Americans were the pacesetters. John Ford's first feature, *Straight Shooting*, made when he was 23, can stand with

honour beside any Western from the seventy years since it was made. Cecil B. DeMille's *The Whispering Chorus* is a gripping thriller that anticipates the film noir: the plot may well have inspired Cornell Woolrich's *I Married a Dead Man*. An early Frank Borzage Western, *Until They Get Me*, is not much inferior to Ford. Victor Schertzinger's *The Hired Man* is a moving tribute to a lost rural world. W. S. Van Dyke's *Lady of the Dugout* (recently rediscovered by Kevin Brownlow) offers a gritty documentary view of the old West, with the leading roles played by two real-life former outlaws, Al and Frank Jennings. This kind of autobiographical performance was in vogue at the time: in *Whirl of Life*, Irene and Vernon Castle enact

SCANDINAVIAN PANORAMA

Pordenone's sizable selection of early Scandinavian cinema again raised an unresolved question. How did the Danish cinema of 1910-15 come to be so advanced in terms of narrative progression, sharp cutting within scenes and beautiful photographic textures? As the little dramas succeeded each other—crime serials, tales of fallen women and the Danish speciality, circus fables—one was repeatedly struck by the modernity of the imagery. A series such as *Dr Gar el Hama* by various directors actually pre-dated Lang, with the master criminal trying on disguises in his underground lair and the hero trapped by a rush of water in a claustrophobic cellar. The less spectacular love stories also gained from the sincere emotionalism of the acting: Asta Nielsen may have been the first 'modern' European actress, but she was not the only one.

Two famous circus featurettes by Alfred Lind, *The Four Devils* (1911) and *The Flying Circus* (1912), boast a constantly lively surface, with smooth alter-

nations between long and medium shots across the whole arena and some startling visual conceits, such as a high-wire act played against open skies and scudding clouds. Perilous fires and animal escapes abound, yet both films also yield a vein of quiet poetry. *The Flying Circus* ends with a touch that could almost be called Chaplinesque, as the vampish girl is left alone on a dusty road while the caravans roll by.

Benjamin Christensen's *Night of Revenge* (Denmark, 1915) and *Witchcraft Through the Ages* (Sweden, 1922) are well known to NFT audiences, but less so, apparently, in some quarters of Europe and America. Seen again in this context, the former looked not like a period piece but like the first truly modern film. The chief discovery, however, among the longer Danish films was Holger-Madsen's *Down with Weapons!* (1914). The deep focus photography of this mini-epic, with its elaborate scenes of deploying armies, charges and retreats, was shown off in a pristine print.

As the heroine wanders through camps and villages in search of her husband, the feeling of waste and catastrophe is greater than in any other war drama of its day. The climax has her enter a huge shed filled to bursting with nurses and wounded men, all immobilised into absolute stillness. Again the use of high long shots and distanced, airy locations seems years ahead of its time.

Twelve hitherto inaccessible films by Georg af Klercker (1877-1951) were the main Swedish discoveries. Count and soldier, Klercker worked in the theatre before settling at the Hasselblad Studios in Gothenburg where he made more than a score of films between 1915 and 1918, usually in the summer months. He later gave up the cinema in favour of business, but reappeared as an occasional actor in Swedish films of the 30s. His films are a mixture: crime thrillers à la Feuillade, domestic farces, war stories, tearful melodramas.

The single unifying factor of Klercker's films is their sharp pellucid images. These are seen to maximum effect in *The Prisoner of Karlsten Fortress* (1916), virtually one protracted chase ending in the fortress of the title, which is explored from every possible angle. The density

a somewhat fantastic account of their rise to fame as ballroom dancers. At the time the couple were 23, and their verve and charm invests the film—the only feature they made together.

The panorama revealed, too, what an extraordinary variety of acting styles was possible in this formative period, ranging from the heavy, stylised miming of the German films to the easy naturalism of Ford. The legendary Vladimir Mayakowsky, a charismatic 25-year-old, acting in his own film *The Lady and the Hooligan*, performs in a style that would not be out of place in a youth film made today. In *Jeanne Dore*, Sarah Bernhardt resolutely refused to adapt her theatrical habits, yet still impresses by power, integrity and the sheer bravery of undertaking a leading role at the age of 70 and totally immobilised after the amputation of a leg. Douglas Fairbanks can still infect an audience with his manic ebullience. Bill Hart is the quintessence of the good-bad man; Pina Menichelli (in *Il Fuoco*) the supreme *femme fatale*, her feathered hats emphasising her air of bird of prey. From the Russian Ballet, Theodore Kosloff brings his own demonic glamour to Cecil B. DeMille's spectacle about the Conquest of Mexico, *The Woman That God Forgot*. 'We didn't need voices. We had faces then.'

Avignon presented as an extra what must have been the oddest event in the forty years of the Festival—a nightly show of blue movies, styled 'Les Enfers des Cinémathèques'. The respectability of the event was beyond question. The projections took place at midnight in the courtyard of the biggest lycée in the city, bounded on three sides by the Gendarmerie, the Préfecture and the medi-

eval ramparts of the City of the Popes. Archives around the world had lent films from their arcana, which proved to be considerable. The largest collection of pornography is held by the Yugoslav national archive in Belgrade. Our own National Film Archive was unable to oblige: apparently the selection system in this country has consistently excluded material of such dubious nature. The New York Museum of Modern Art co-operated, but conducted the correspondence on plain, unheaded notepaper.

Raymond Borde, of the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, who collaborated in the event, argues that if it is an aim of film archives to build up a continuing record of history and social habits, no aspect of socio-psychology, however unpalatable, can be ignored. He deplores that most archives have jibbed at preserving the burgeoning pornographic production of the past fifteen years, which may well now vanish without leaving a trace of that particular phase of shifting attitudes and tolerance.

The earliest fragments of movie erotica have undoubted documentary interest. Not only is it possible to study the curious technicalities of Victorian lingerie, but we can see that physiqués really were different, conditioned by the styles of the time. These early strippers actually do have wasp waists, are more rotund before and behind, and adopt a curious cantilevered posture, rather like hens, breast balancing bottom.

On the continent, at least, the main market for these films was the *maisons closes*: the scholarly Raymond Borde calls them 'trailers for paid sex'. In France, production of clandestine films for this very specific purpose appears to have continued right up until the closure of the brothels, to judge from some fairly

seedy examples from the 30s and 40s included in the programmes. Avignon had also traced copies of some of the legendary films that emanated from the nether regions of the Hollywood studios. But its special find in this category was the *oeuvre* of a French amateur, Charles Way. For over forty years, from the 20s to the 60s, M Way applied himself with maniacal dedication and very little talent to the making of erotic films. His actresses appear, from their cheery compliance and the cheeky grins they throw at the camera, to have been professional ladies.

Way's supreme moment as voyeur and dirty old man came late in his career, in the era of the miniskirt, when he devised a suitcase containing a hidden camera which filmed through a mirror set into an aperture in the top of the case. With his suitcase, M Way followed young ladies in the Opéra quarter, gently intruding his device under their skirts, to film what was above. Technically it worked surprisingly well, and the film that resulted—a hectic succession of shots of pedestrian lingerie—has a surrealist fascination. M Way's suitcase still exists: for it seems that the police eventually became suspicious of this furtive old person trotting up and down with a suitcase, ran him in, and consigned his singular apparatus to their black museum.

No doubt the last thing in M Way's mind was to bequeath his works to posterity, so to speak; but then, can any of those other anonymous persons who dabbled in this curious backwater of cinematography have ever dreamed that their works would one day be exposed to the public at an international festival of the arts? In the history of the movies are many mansions. □

and texture of the tinted photography is amazing, from the low-key exploration of the dungeons complete with flashing torches and sudden traps to a climactic chase on the seashore, in blazing sunshine and amid crashing waves.

Reveille (1917) and *Love's Victory* (1916) are on the whole more studio-

bound, their lovely light interiors and furnishings reflecting Klercker's earlier experience as a designer. The first has echoes of Stroheim, with a pair of put-upon lovers—he sent away by the military, she married off to an elderly officer—eventually conquering the opposition. Stroheim would have been less conven-

tional and sentimental; nevertheless Klercker builds the story powerfully, especially in a party scene punctuated by sudden giant close-ups. *Love's Victory* echoes *Stella Dallas* with a story of a plain dancer (the director's wife); she is married to a rich man but tormented by the return of a former husband. Notable for an unusually elliptical opening, the drama is again tightly interwoven with the decors of a large country house. Klercker makes intricate use of full-length mirrors reflecting action in adjoining rooms, a favourite device which prompted several delegates to speculate whether the Danish-born Sirk could ever have seen these films.

Klercker's scripts, many of them his own, often let him down, and some of his films have a certain stiffness, not improved by patches of awkward acting. Yet their faults do not invalidate their visual beauty and their feeling for air, space, light and shade. When the remaining half-dozen films have been restored and reassessed in Sweden, it will be time for the National Film Theatre to explore them, preferably in the context of other work from this remarkable era.

JOHN GILLET

Georg af Klercker's *The Prisoner of Karlsten Fortress* (1916).



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Writing for Visconti



The daughter of Emilio Cecchi, one of Italy's leading literary figures, Suso Cecchi D'Amico has been called the most significant screenwriter, along with Cesare Zavattini, to have worked in postwar Italian film. Now in her early seventies, she has been writing screenplays for more than forty years. She has worked with most of the major Italian directors, and most notably with Luchino Visconti, with whom she collaborated closely on some ten films; she has won the Silver Ribbon for best Italian screenplay three times. Her credits include Luigi Zampa's *Vivere in Pace* (1946), De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Miracle in Milan* (1951), Renato Castellani's *E Primavera* (1949), Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962) and Visconti's *Senso* (1954), *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960) and *The Leopard* (1963). The following interview took place in Rome, on 16 June 1986.

PETER BRUNETTE: How did you become involved in films?

SUSO CECCHI D'AMICO: I was very lucky, I must say, because I had cinema in my home. My father was a critic and writer, and for a while in the early 1930s he was artistic director for the Cines studio, which was then almost the only production company here in Italy. The Italian cinema completely changed under my father's direction: for the first time intellectuals were invited to collaborate. Pirandello, for example, was asked to write a story for a film. I was about eighteen, and it was a big, big adventure for my sister, brother and me. It was then that I first met people I would later work with, like De Sica. He had just been discovered by Mario Camerini, who had given him the lead in a film called *Gli Uomini, che Mascalzoni!* [1932].

Your father was also responsible for Blasetti's *1860* [1933] and Walter Ruttmann's *Acciaio* [1933].

Yes. My father left the cinema shortly afterwards, though, because he didn't have enough time for his own writing,

An interview with Suso Cecchi D'Amico by PETER BRUNETTE

and because he didn't like dealing with the business end of things. But he never left completely, and people often came to ask him for advice.

Later, when I was about 25, some of the film people who were still coming to see my father would ask me to look at their screenplays to find out if they would interest young people, something I have since done with my own children. Then, at a certain moment, one of them, Carlo Ponti, asked if I would like to work on a screenplay with Alberto Moravia and Ennio Flaiano for a film to be made by Renato Castellani, who was then a young director. I accepted, and I have never stopped since.

I had already done some theatre translations with my father, two plays by Shakespeare and some other work, but my first lines in the cinema were written with Moravia and Flaiano for a film called *Avatar*, which was never made. I remember exactly when we were working on it, because right in the middle we had the news of the bombing of Hiroshima. Moravia was someone else I had known for years; even before *Time of Indifference* was published, he often used to come to see my father.

You also began working with Visconti at about this time.

In the theatre. I translated Hemingway's *Fifth Column* for him, and later Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* and some light comedy. We also wrote a screenplay together, *La Carrozza del Santissimo Sacramento*, but the film was never made because of some problems Visconti had with the producer. Later, it was made by Jean Renoir as *Le Carrosse d'Or*, with Anna Magnani, but not from our script.

You said somewhere in an Italian interview that you always wanted Visconti to talk about a project as much as possible so that you could find out his point of view. Is this how you see the role of the scriptwriter?

Yes. Everybody is so surprised that I have worked on so many different kinds of films. But my work has something of the artisan in it. And that is something I like very much. I mean, to understand what the director is interested in and what he does best, and then to give him something that suits him. At the end Visconti and I hardly talked at all about the project itself, because I knew exactly what he wanted. For example, when I wrote the Proust screenplay for him, it was the easiest work I ever did, because we had talked about Proust for so many years that I knew which were the scenes he wanted and just what kind of picture he would like.

Did you ever want to become a director yourself?

The director needs to be able to command, and I can't. Maybe I could have done a film, in secret, with my own money, but to risk other people's money would have paralysed me. So I write screenplays which are very rich, and full of detailed indications, but I never thought I had the right character for a director.

Do you think it has anything to do with being a woman of your generation?

No. It's just a matter of character. My father was the same way. He had a

strong character, but was not good at commanding.

On this subject, I've always been struck by the fact that you were the only woman involved in neo-realism.

But it was not because. . . I don't know why. Now there are many.

Did you encounter any patronising attitudes because you were a woman?

Absolutely not. As I told you, I had known most of these men since I was a child, and we had grown up together. Maybe I was very lucky. I always say that my own story is not a general rule, because of the authority of my father. He always had open house on Sundays, and I met all the European intellectuals and some Americans. Right after the war, when William Saroyan came to Italy the first thing he did was visit my father: I met Thomas Mann, everybody. It was a very full life. Things are different today. There are no more cafés, except maybe in Paris. Then there were three or four places where you always knew you would find someone. Artists, novelists, critics, really very few movie people. It was helpful to discuss projects, to get new ideas. We were poor but happy.

What was it like to write screenplays in the neo-realist fashion, in common, sitting together round a table?

We still do it that way. I think it's very useful, especially for comedy. But the main difference between Italy and America in this respect is that we give credit to everybody who had anything at all to do with the script, whereas in America they don't. We didn't care about it, because all the cinema professionals knew just who did what anyway. In the credits of *Bicycle Thieves* there is the name of Gherardo Gherardi, who was already dead when we began the script. I never met him. De Sica liked him very much and had asked him to be involved in the film, so putting him in the credits was a sort of homage.

On *Bicycle Thieves* we worked for about four months, meeting people, going to places, getting from reality the ideas for the film, which are quite dif-

ferent from the original book. The idea of the theft of the bicycle is there, but all the steps leading to it are different.

Once a script was written, did you often go on the set?

Yes, very much, when it was a film you cared about. Also because you always had to make little changes, especially shooting as we were in the streets. A situation would arise that would give you a hint about doing something differently, and there were always changes.

The process of making a film has always seemed to be more relaxed and spontaneous in Italy than it is in the United States.

It depends on the individual. Rossellini, for example, was always very light and amusing, while Visconti was much more serious on the set. De Sica was between the two—full of humour, and lazier than Visconti, but not as lazy as Rossellini. Also Rossellini had little interest in the pictorial quality of a film, while for Luchino it was extremely important. Again, De Sica was between the two.

Let's talk about Visconti. There seems to be a certain fascination with decadence, especially in his later films.

My father used to say, 'Everybody thinks it's so easy to be a decadent.' (Laughter.)

How did you feel about it? Was this a theme that was important to you or were you simply attuning yourself to Visconti's interests?

You have to remember Visconti's background, the kind of family he came from, the life he led before he started to work. The great discoveries that came from working with Renoir, then the big adventure of being arrested by the Nazis as a partisan. Luchino was also very different from the others because he had had so much experience in the theatre and in opera.

What about *The Damned*? No other Italian director of his generation would have made the film in the same way, especially in terms of its focus on homosexuality and incest.

Visconti knew these aristocratic families

intimately, and he was fully aware of the decay of this society. He was speaking of things which were very close to him; for example, the life of his father. One can understand that he was telling stories he knew well. But they are always told from a very moral point of view. There are no monuments: it's the story of a decay.

I didn't work on *The Damned*. Do you remember the story of Profumo in England? Well, that was the starting point for *The Damned*. And then it happened that I read a long report on the Krupp family, which I sent to Visconti. I myself had been to Germany only once as a tourist, and I didn't feel that I could write a story set there. But I thought it was a good idea for him. So I started to work on Proust, and he went on to do *The Damned* with other people.

Tell me something about Visconti's homosexuality. Was it known to everybody as early as, say, the 40s?

I think it was unknown to himself. Luchino had lots of experience with women; at one point he even had to get married, and later on he had affairs. Then, as a good aristocrat and man of the Renaissance, he thought he could have boys as well, without realising that the balance was continually shifting in one direction. In the latter part of his life, it was only homosexual. But he would have been upset if you had called him a homosexual, and he spoke of homosexuals with contempt. He was really quite virile. And he also had a very strong sense of the family. He loved my children, and they loved him, and we used to spend a lot of time together at my house in the summer. He would be very strict with the children, but then sometimes he would bring one of his boys to the house. (Laughter.)

I want to ask you about some of the things Gaia Servadio said in her biography of Visconti, just to set the record straight, especially concerning the masochistic element of his relationships. She says that he deliberately put himself in unhappy situations in which he would be hurt. Did it seem this way to you?

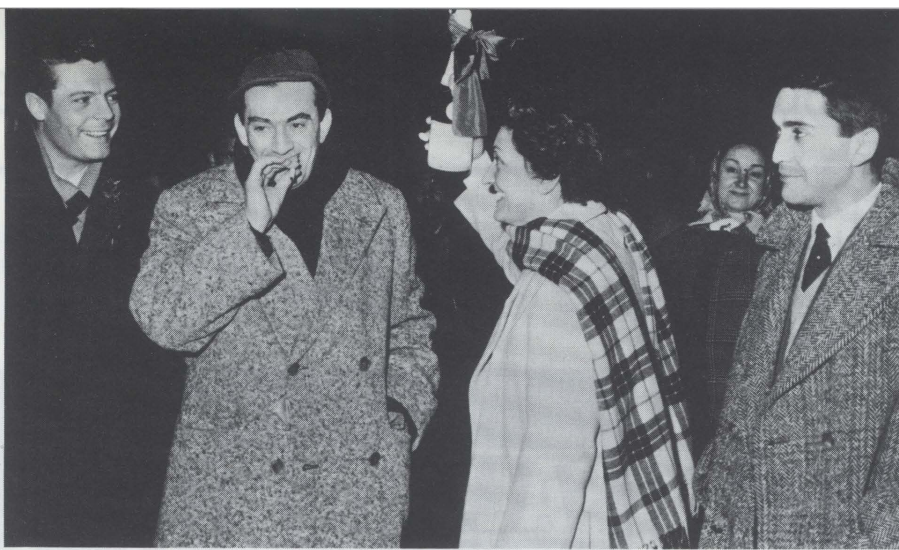
I must say, no. I think Gaia's portrait is miles away from the truth. She knew him very little, and saw him only a few times when he was already ill. I don't mean to criticise her work merely because she said unpleasant things about Luchino. I can also say some unpleasant things about him. But her portrait doesn't resemble him at all. Absolutely not.

What specifically doesn't resemble him?

Nothing. Though it's true that there was one thing which always struck me as strange. He was so severe and patriarchal and honest, and he never did anything to please the critics or the producers. He always did exactly what he wanted. He was completely indifferent. But he also had friends whom he knew very well were thieves—for example, an architect whom he had

White Nights: 'We built an entire city at Cinecittà.'





Mastroianni, Visconti, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Franco Cristaldi.

working in the house—people who were known thieves. Luchino didn't care at all. This was so different from his normal judgment. He had an immense curiosity about those people who behaved so badly. He seemed to like to watch them. Other people he would send away for the tiniest lie, while at the same time he had this 'court' of bad people, thieves, mediocrities. Maybe it was because he didn't care much for them, because when he cared, he could get very angry. He was furious with Helmut Berger when he suspected him of taking drugs.

Is it fair to say that Visconti was in some ways fascinated with sin and evil?

Not really, because he was usually so severe. Then there were other times. . . The kind of people he had around him at the end of his life—his secretary, his nurse—were very. . . He was so proud, and to have to depend on someone else for everything was so difficult for him that I think the only people he could ask to do these things were people he despised. I can't think of any other reason. And I don't agree with what Gaia says about the masochism. Luchino could be very cruel; he was a very strong character. He could send people away brutally. He was not a man of our time. He was a kind of Renaissance *condottiere*.

He always looks so fierce in his photographs—those eyebrows. . .

He was terribly good looking. When he entered a room, no one could ignore him. He had a slow, solemn way of moving; there was always something very solemn about him. Burt Lancaster did two perfect 'portraits' of him. In *The Leopard*, he studied Luchino's every movement. Then he did it again in *Conversation Piece*.

Did Visconti realise what Lancaster was doing?

No. Even when I told him earlier that he was the Leopard of the book, he said, No, no. There's a famous photograph of Visconti showing Lancaster how to move, thinking he was showing him the character, but instead it was himself. And Lancaster got him down perfectly.

Can you tell me something about *Le Notti Bianche* [*White Nights*, 1957],

which you worked on? When the picture came out, many critics were disappointed at the reversal from the political and realistic nature of Visconti's earlier films.

They said he wasn't 'engaged' enough. Well, the film was financed cooperatively by Marcello Mastroianni, myself, Luchino and Franco Cristaldi. After *Senso*, nobody was interested in Luchino because they thought his films cost too much. Mastroianni had never done a serious film; he always played either a taxi driver or in some kind of light comedy. So, since we were all friends, we decided to do a very small film all by ourselves. Cristaldi, who was just starting as a producer, joined in to make it all possible. We chose this short story by Dostoevsky, and wanted to make a very small, 'smart' picture. But things got out of hand immediately. Luchino, who was in Venice for the film festival, called to tell me that he had asked Maria Schell to be in the film, and I said, Oh my God, but we have to pay her! And we wanted to make a small, small picture.

That was the beginning. Then Luchino said that since the film was not meant to be realistic, it would be better to build sets in a studio rather than shoot in the streets. Building sets! We were terrified for months. Then, after we built an entire city at Cinecittà, Luchino decided

that he wanted a smoky atmosphere, but since we couldn't use real smoke, two enormous curtains had to be constructed specially for the film. That was absolutely Luchino. He had no sense of money. He was the most generous man I ever knew, and when it was his own money at stake he didn't care at all. But the rest of us were completely terrified.

The point, then, is that the film was never taken very seriously by any of you?

We just wanted to make something modest in a month or two. We were only trying to do a nice little film whose real purpose was to demonstrate that Marcello Mastroianni could act. Luchino, of course, didn't demonstrate anything because the film ended up being so expensive. It was also this film, by the way, which led to Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti*.

To do something with this enormous set that had been built for *White Nights*, we decided to write another film. The title '*I Soliti Ignoti*' (the usual unknown persons) referred to the headlines which had unfortunately begun to appear rather frequently in the newspapers concerning house robberies. What happened, however, is that because Monicelli wanted to try Gassman out in comedy, and Cristaldi wanted someone else for his role, by the time they got around to shooting we had to vacate the studio with the big set, which was originally the whole purpose of the film. In any case, we had a great time writing the screenplay. Monicelli is an excellent director of comedy. Unfortunately, we did a sequel a year or two ago, something I didn't really approve of, called *I Soliti Ignoti Vent Anni Dopo*. The screenplay is good, I can assure you, but. . .

What are you doing now? Are you still hard at work?

Most recently I wrote the screenplay for Monicelli's *Speriamo che sia Femmina* [*Let's Hope It's a Girl*]. It's a good film. Unfortunately, though, there hasn't been that much to do, because the film industry, as usual, is in such a state of crisis in Italy. ■

I Soliti Ignoti: 'We had a great time writing the screenplay.'



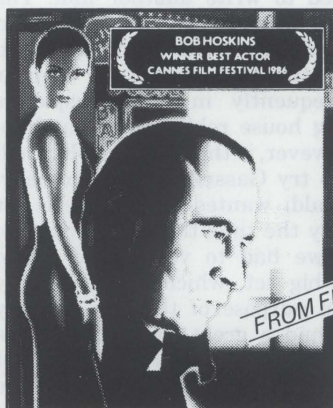
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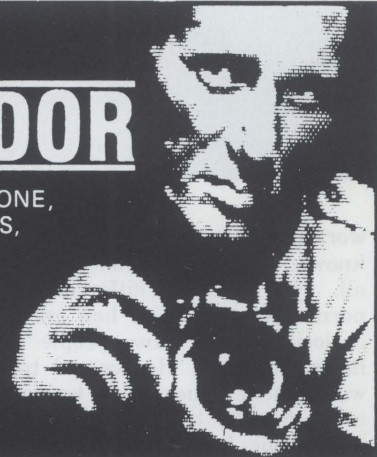
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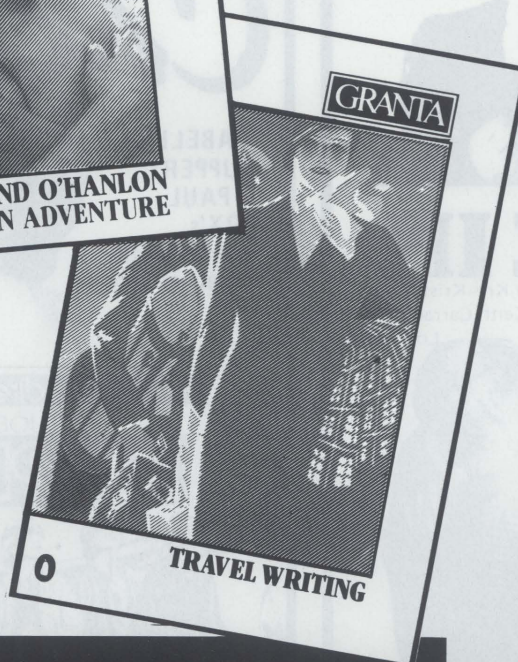
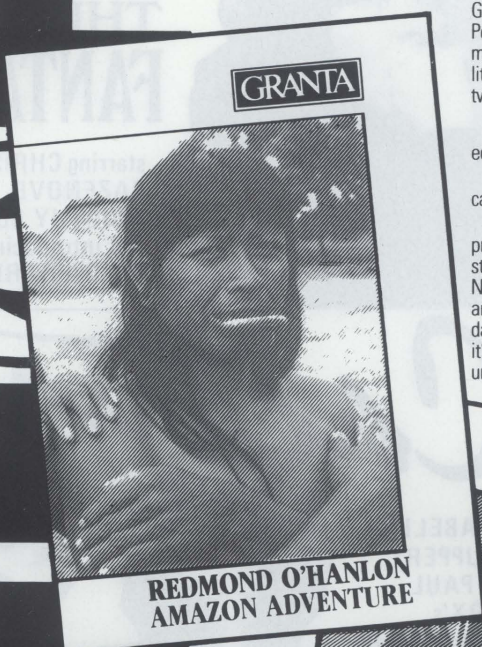
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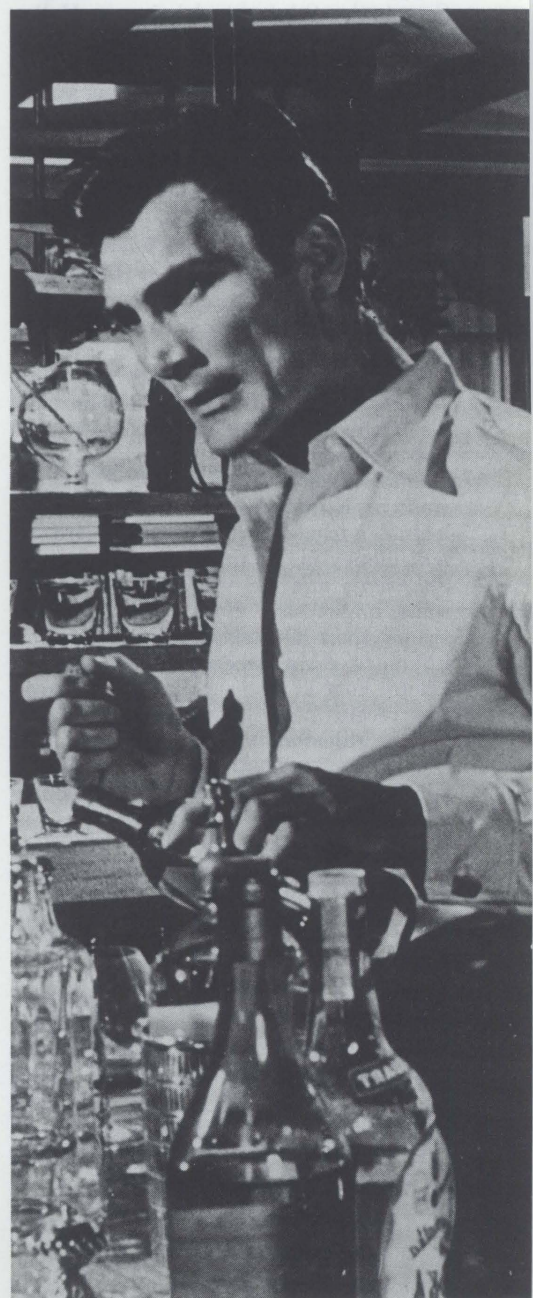


None But the Lonely Heart: Cary Grant.

Consider three contemporary playwrights. Sam Shepard becomes a movie star, a heartthrob; Harold Pinter turns out clever screenplays; David Hare directs films—and they do so without looking over their shoulders. Who today would criticise them for diminishing themselves as playwrights, squandering their talents, or just plain selling out? Selling Out—in capitals—the very notion is an anachronism. But in the 30s, for the theatre, the term still meant something. The stage was where ‘real’ dramatic artists made their stand. Eugene O’Neill never, ever went to Hollywood, Clifford Odets was reminded over and over again. And if Odets wished to be the next O’Neill—or maybe better than O’Neill—he must stay in New York and pump out plays. Some fifty-odd years ago, in 1935, MGM offered Odets \$3,000 a week, or more, to write screenplays in Los Angeles. The playwright, though amazed, resisted. ‘Like a conspirator, he whispered that he might be willing to consider it,’ wrote Harold Clurman, co-founder of the Group Theatre, in *The Fervent Years*. The Group, however, kept its resident playwright in hand.

In Hollywood, riches awaited Odets. In New York, he remained almost as indigent as ever. He shared the heartfelt frustration of young Ralph in *Awake and Sing!*: ‘He dreams all night of fortunes. Why not? Don’t it say in the movies he should have a personal steamship, pyjamas for fifty dollars a pair, and a toilet like a monument. But in the morning he wakes up and for ten dollars he can’t fix his teeth.’ Odets planned his escape to Hollywood. He was angered by the Group’s righteous demands on him.

Ever the hopeful suitor, MGM invested \$17,000 in Odets’ play *Paradise Lost*—significantly, the Group Theatre didn’t turn down this Hollywood financing. But the play faltered at the box-office, and the courtship abruptly ended. Though the MGM contract was lost, Odets adopted



The Big Knife: Jack Palance.

a new tack: he paid a money-raising visit to Hollywood on the Group's behalf. Conscience-stricken in the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, he bragged about the superiority of the Group Theatre back home in New York. He assured Lewis Milestone that his real interest was in the stage and the purpose of his trip was to keep *Paradise Lost* afloat; Milestone countered by asking Odets to produce a screenplay for *The General Died at Dawn*, from an unpublished China-set pulp novel which had landed on Ernst Lubitsch's desk at Paramount.

In February 1936, Odets signed a four-week contract with Paramount Pictures worth \$2,500 a week. According to his biographer Margaret Brenman-Gibson (*Clifford Odets, American Playwright*, 1981), he felt respected 'as he had not since the opening of *Awake and Sing!*' It was as if, six months after the death of his own mother, Odets had achieved Bessie's most passionate hope for her son Ralph: 'I should only live to see the day when he rides up to the door in a big car with a chauffeur and a radio. I could die happy, believe me' (*Awake and Sing!*). Seemingly, Odets liked being in Hollywood. That was his guilt. How could he explain this to Clurman and the Group? The point can be made by jumping ahead for a moment, to Odets' autobiographical play about Southern California, *The Big Knife* (1949). The play dissatisfied Clurman: the motivation for the protagonist's unhappiness was too shadowy. "First you must show," I said, "how anxious the actor is to leave Hollywood, how and why he hates it so much..." Odets suddenly blurted out, "He loves it."

What could be more enjoyable than writing at Lewis Milestone's behest on *The General Died at Dawn*? Director of the uncompromisingly pacifist *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), Milestone was a European-born Jewish intellectual, a friend of the Group Theatre (he lent money for its production of *Johnny Johnson*), and he was a left-liberal—some might say, more politically conscious than Odets. When, under the influence of Malraux's novel *Man's Fate*, Odets edged his screenplay towards the recent revolutionary struggles in China, Milestone did not balk. In fact, the director added (uncredited) a key political scene to the script: the opening, in which a high-handed colonialist is punched to the ground by the hero, O'Hara, an American fighting the Chinese revolution.

At night, Odets struggled with *The Silent Partner*, the labour play he had long promised the Group. The film script, however, progressed smoothly, at the rate of three or four pages a day. His hero's impoverished early life was modelled on that of the Group actor Jules (later John) Garfield. For the right-wing antagonist, General Yang, Odets used Hitler's oratory. For good measure he added fire-and-brimstone agitprop, Big Speeches attacking capitalists and dictators which could have been lifted verbatim from propagandist stands in *Waiting for Lefty*.

Had Odets managed to bite the hand which fed him \$2,500 a week? By May he had finished the script and was so confident of its virtues, both aesthetic and political, that he told the *New York Times*: 'There is no attempt in Hollywood to stop anyone doing good writing... I believe that my ideas can be put over in pictures.' To prove his point, the shooting script of *The General Died at Dawn* found its way to the radical journal the *New Masses* for ideological inspection. In the magazine's July 1936 issue Sidney Kaufman endorsed the screenplay without reservation, praising Odets' instant mastery of cinematic technique. The *New Masses* also printed the text of two scenes, one in which O'Hara expounds on why he fights dictatorships ('You ask me why I'm for oppressed people? Because I got a background of oppression myself, and O'Hara and elephants don't forget'), and a second in which he rails against the warlord Yang for his self-serving philosophy ('Your belief is in your own very limited self—mine is in people! One day they'll walk on earth, straight, proud... men, not animals').

Both speeches survived in the release print. Why? Because here was evidence—to Paramount's glory—of the hand of Clifford Odets, the famous author of *Waiting for Lefty*: There is, however, evidence of post-production studio tampering. The lovers, Gary Cooper and Madeleine Carroll, are thrown together on a train in the middle of a complicated plot without introduction: the key meeting scene is simply missing. Surely Odets wrote it, and surely Milestone filmed it? Important political elements have also vanished. Kaufman alludes to a village laid ruin by Yang and a dead woman in a puddle: neither detail is in the movie. Yang's devastation is kept off screen entirely. Kaufman rejoiced that '150 million eyes and ears closely attentive' would heed the line, 'We who have been the anvil—will soon be the hammer.' But he rejoiced too soon: Odets' most overtly Marxist passage is not to be found in *The General Died at Dawn*.

O'Hara's radical speeches are in fact practically all that remains of 'leftist' content—and even these are undercut by Gary Cooper's delivery. Paramount Pictures was not the Group Theatre, and Gary Cooper, a political conservative, utters Odets' passionate words with the commitment of an actor under a multi-picture contract. Clurman wrote to Odets: 'Our greatest lesson was to hear lines so characteristic of you become almost imperceptible... when said by actors with no relation to them.'

The General Died at Dawn won no Academy Awards, nor deserved to. Seen today, it seems a silly, toothless imitation of, in particular, *Shanghai Express* (Paramount, 1932), which was similarly located on an Oriental train to nowhere. General Yang is a brazen copy of the title character in Frank Capra's *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1932). (And, yes, Gary Cooper does say to Madeleine Carroll, 'We could have made wonderful

music together.' That woeful line was written by Odets.) As for the film's politics, who can unravel the warring sides? When Paramount re-released the film in 1949, an opening title was added: 'Some time back in the early days of the Chinese government, the Chinese people, led by the great Chiang Kai-Shek, fought to rid themselves of the last of the warlords who preyed upon remote provinces. This picture is inspired by that battle and by its victorious conclusion.'

Odets never refuted this Cold War interpretation, which was undoubtedly the antithesis of his intentions: Chiang Kai-Shek, in fact, was probably the inspiration of General Yang. However, when Odets appeared voluntarily before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1952, he denied having inserted any social comment into the film, or even that he had told the *Daily Worker* in 1937 that 'I got away with some stuff' in the script. Odets confessed, perhaps disingenuously: 'I thought the whole matter was nonsense because *The General Died at Dawn* is a picture that starred Gary Cooper and [was] done by Paramount. There was nothing of any subversive or propaganda nature in it... I don't think Hollywood has ever made a movie with left propaganda in it. And I think the whole matter of social messages... cannot happen.'

Back in Hollywood, 1937, now married to the actress Luise Rainer, Odets was employed by Paramount on two projects, *Gettysburg* and *Castles in Spain*. Of *Gettysburg* Margaret Brenman-Gibson wrote: 'As soon would become his practice, Odets let this film script become longer and longer as he tried to improve it. He seemed unable to accomplish this, and the mammoth screenplay, with its torrent of colourful, lively dialogue, would soon be shelved...' *Castles in Spain*, an adaptation of Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Loves of Jeanne Ney*, switched to Loyalist Spain, went through two versions before the project was passed to another Group playwright, John Howard Lawson; his rewrite became the film *Blockade* (1938). Odets complained in public for the first time about the Hollywood screenwriting process. He told *World Film News*: 'When I saw [*Blockade*], I couldn't find one line left of what I'd written... I never sat through a film y'know without thinking to myself, "That's not true. It's a lie..."'

Hollywood began to fill up with members of the Group Theatre seeking film work: Elia Kazan, Morris Carnovsky, Phoebe Brand, Ruth Nelson, Luther Adler and even Harold Clurman himself. The arrival of his colleagues did not free Odets' scenario-writing blocks, but it did ease the passage of his new play, *Golden Boy*. The critic Gerald Rabkin noted how Odets turned Hollywood subject matter and technique (the short scene and the fadeout) 'against itself, in order to combat the mythic Hollywood success story.' In *Golden Boy*, Odets, the insider, thumbed his nose at Hollywood. Unlike his pre-studio plays, which were



Train to nowhere: Carroll and Cooper in *The General Died at Dawn*.



'A little mystery thriller': Harold Clurman's *Deadline at Dawn*.

sprinkled with references to cinema stars and visits to the local bijou, *Golden Boy* never directly mentions the movies. Joe Bonaparte punches his way through the boxing world without once thinking of Paramount Pictures. At the same time, Odets expected his audience to recognise that Bonaparte's rise to the top, in a plot full of stock film figures, follows the mythic, linear form of Hollywood at its streamlined best. Then Odets mocked Hollywood with the downbeat off-screen deaths of Joe and Lorna, as intentionally unmotivated as the most tacked-on studio ending.

Golden Boy was a Broadway hit and Odets was converted back to the theatre. He published a bilious attack on the cinema under the studio system in the *New York Times* (21 November 1937): 'It is sad to see what movies are doing to America's consciousness of itself... Hollywood has set our citizens examples of conduct and behaviour patterns fit only for lower animals.' Odets became obsessed with getting the Federal Theatre to produce *The Silent Partner* across America (that same play which had lain stillborn in Hollywood because of *The General Died at Dawn*). Meanwhile, his new play, *Rocket to the Moon*, maltreated and ridiculed its only Hollywood-tainted character, the movie dance director Willy Wax. On the East Coast, Wax is regarded as an interloper, practically a carpetbagger. Success, Odets wrote of this weakling and womaniser, had given him an 'unpleasant uneasiness'. He narrowly escapes death by strangulation.

Odets was asked on radio if serious-minded dramatists should try Hollywood. 'Flatly, the answer is they must stay where they are, myself included.' True to his new word, Odets declined Rouben Mamoulian's offer to write the script of *Golden Boy* for Columbia Pictures. In 1939, Hollywood took its revenge. The film of *Golden Boy*, written by Daniel Taradash and Lewis Meltzer, stripped away Joe's brother Frank, the radical labour organiser, and also much

of Odets' social-consciousness sermonising. Most serious, the unhappy ending was blithely repaired with a full life ahead for Joe and Lorna.

In 1940, unable to mount a Boston-to-New York production of *Night Music* without investment money from United Artists, Odets was lured to Los Angeles to try to write a *Night Music* screenplay for the producers Albert Lewin and David Loew. His efforts were unavailing. The dramatist's swift artistic comeback was the 1941 play *Clash by Night*, in which the villain, Earl, is a movie projectionist. Willy Wax was only threatened with death; Earl is actually strangled. He dies in his projection box ('a veritable picture of some minor hell') while a vapid Hollywood picture runs on, wedding bells on the soundtrack.

The keynote speech in *Clash by Night* echoes Odets' criticism of Hollywood in *Awake and Sing!* Motion pictures give false hope to America's Little People. Joe speaks for all the play's lost characters: 'Earl, Jerry, Mae, millions like them, clinging to a goofy dream—expecting life to be a picnic. Who taught them that? Radio, songs, the movies...' *Clash by Night* failed as *Night Music* had failed. Odets returned to Hollywood in 1942 and again (with his new wife, Betty Grayson) in 1943: this time he stayed for five years. In 1948 he told the *New York Times*: 'I went West... because I wanted to shake out of my system the disappointments of two successive commercial failures in the theatre... I was looking for a period of "creative repose": money, rest, and simple clarity.' Again he turned about. 'I went to Hollywood and found much of interest there... The cinema medium, as the platitude goes, is a very great one: why not explore the possibilities? Why not mingle with and learn from some of the world's shrewdest theatre technicians, including writers?'

Odets was signed by Warner Brothers to write a life of George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue*. Odets adored Gershwin and his script was 900 pages long. When he delivered it, Jack L. Warner

promptly fired him, even though, according to Jean Negulesco, Odets begged to be allowed for no extra fee to compress the script to a more normal length. 'J. L. was adamant,' Negulesco remembered. 'He didn't want Odets in the studio. Another writer was called in to do a completely new job...'

The next studio to beckon Odets to Hollywood was RKO. In 1943 his agent arranged for Odets to write a movie version of *None But the Lonely Heart*, from the new novel by Richard Llewellyn. Odets liked the tale of a Cockney lad wandering in the bowels of between-the-wars London. He took the train West. On arrival at RKO, he learnt that Cary Grant was planned for the lead. 'There was silence for a moment and I asked if anyone read this book. It seemed no one had... When I met Cary for the first time, he said that he'd like me to direct the movie, too... [he] told me if I could write the words, I shall certainly be able to direct their use. Well, I did.'

Out of Clifford Odets' screenplays came the narrative technique for *Golden Boy*; out of his life in Hollywood came *The Big Knife*. At the centre of his career as a film-maker, however, is *None But the Lonely Heart*. Among its admirers were James Agee and Jean Renoir, and the reason is not far to seek. On his first time behind the camera, Odets took command. The result was assured, poetic and personal. Though there are compromises in the studio casting—an insufferably pixyish Barry Fitzgerald and a miscast Cary Grant—*None But the Lonely Heart* remains a small model of a successful literary transformation, rather than an adaptation.

The ambitious, overlong and over-written novel is about a working-class boy who never learns. Like his father, Ernie Mott aspires to be a painter; but he's sidetracked by flashy mobsters. Eventually, he stops talking about art and begins carting a gun. 'The gun felt like some old pal... kind of cool and

steady, ready to do a job without no backchat or fuss.' As his mother lies dying of cancer, Ernie for a moment grows fearful of impending loneliness. 'Funny how the whole place was sort of dead cold without her... He started shaking so much he could hardly make a move, and the place was coming over dark with the grey of rain outside.' By the end, however, Ernie is back to oblivion: 'He was going to get a suit like Jim, and a tie pin, and proper look the part of The Smasher. He started feeling sorry for everybody going to work, because there was no need of it.'

The movie Ernie Mott is of a different, romantic breed: an instantly recognisable Odets dreamer, wishing for so much more than his assigned slum-life existence. As Cary Grant's Ernie Mott walks through London, a voice proclaims: 'The Story of Ernie Mott, who searched for a free, a beautiful and noble life in the second quarter of the twentieth century.' The conflict is pure Odets from the time of *Awake and Sing!*: the head-in-the-clouds son versus the materialistic mother. Ernie's mother wants her son in her second-hand shop. But he objects: 'I'm not in the business of sweating pennies out of devils poorer than myself.' In a patented Odets soliloquy, Ernie ponders his ambitions: 'Life is a piece of meat, when you know how... Take what you want? Right? Right! So that's what it's all about—either be a Victim or be a Thug. But suppose... suppose you don't want to be neither? Not a hare an' not a hound. Then what?'

Having discovered that his mother has cancer, Ernie decides for the time being to stay at home and help in the shop; and the movie's most tender scenes are those in which Ernie and his mother (Ethel Barrymore) come together as a true family. On the outside, however, Ernie chooses to run with the hounds: he joins a gang of thieves headed by Jim Mordinoy, having fallen in love with Mordinoy's girl, Ada. Odets takes Ernie through a swirl of London nightlife: it is a familiar film noir tale of the 40s, of the outsider whose love for a corroded woman weds him to a decadent and criminal, 24-hour-a-day nightclub life. The noir sections of the film are swift, hardboiled and laced with tart dialogue. When Odets makes mistakes they are personal rather than generic, such as overplaying a Jewish pawnbroker, a sententious character who acts as Ernie's conscience, or making too much of the dichotomy between dark Ada and nice Aggie, who plays the cello at night and loves Ernie loyally despite his errant ways.

The last scenes of *None But the Lonely Heart* show Odets in the full flood of his romantic idealism, and they bear comparison with the final curtains of his best plays. The Cockney Orpheus has ascended from the underworld, given Ada back to the sharks and turned away from crime. London is about to be blitzed. He stands on a bridge and addresses his ageing pal, Twite: 'I'm dreaming, Dad, "a dream of a better man." Where's the decent, human life the books tell us



None But the Lonely Heart: Cary Grant, Ethel Barrymore, Clifford Odets.

about? When's the world coming out of its midnight? When's the human soul getting off its knees? Twite reminds him that it sometimes takes a war. Ernie agrees: 'That's it, Dad, one thing is left. I see it plain as London town! Fight with the men who'll fight for a human way of life!' With that chivalrous pledge, Ernie descends from the bridge into the dark tentative city. The last shot is subdued: Ernie, all sobriety, standing at Aggie's door; he enters, but there is no shot of the lovers. Odets holds his camera on the street, keeping sentimentality at bay.

Ethel Barrymore won an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actress for her role in *None But the Lonely Heart*; the film, however, did poorly at the box office, this being the reason, perhaps, why Odets' directing career was curtailed. What did follow, however, were numerous writing assignments in the 1940s and two screen credits.

Odets' 900-page *Rhapsody in Blue* was transformed into *Humoresque* (Warner, 1946). A new writer, Zachary Gold, cut the script down, eliminated the Gershwin biography, but kept Oscar Levant, Gershwin's pianist friend, as a major character; then he grafted what was left on to bits of Fanny Hurst's 1919 short story. That, at least, is director Jean Negulesco's version of how Odets and Zachary Gold came to share screen credit on *Humoresque*. But confusion arises from the number of *Humoresque* versions in the Warner Film Library housed at the University of Wisconsin's Center for Film and Theater Research. There are eight treatments by different people, plus scripts by Waldo Salt and Barney Glazer, but *nothing* from Zachary Gold. (Odets is represented by an anthology composite of *Rhapsody in Blue* scenes, seemingly compiled by a secretary.)

If Odets' career is to be measured by how shrewdly he subverted the studio

system, then *Humoresque* is a meretricious project, the ultimate sellout. It is artificial, overripe, quintessentially Hollywood. But taken on its own terms, as a delirious John Garfield-Joan Crawford 'woman's picture', it often succeeds. It is played to the hilt by the dashing stars, and reaches a crescendo in a grand steal from *A Star Is Born*: Joan Crawford drowns herself in the ocean, in sacrifice, while violinist Garfield plays on, courtesy of Isaac Stern.

In 1946, Odets wrote *Deadline at Dawn* from a florid, amusing Cornell Woolrich thriller. It was directed at RKO by Harold Clurman, who at night in Hollywood wrote his masterly memoir of the 1930s, *The Fervent Years*. Clurman never particularly liked the movies, even when making one. Later he recalled, 'My almost casual attitude towards the job met with resentment, perhaps because I finished the film on time and it proved moderately profitable.' Clurman labelled *Deadline at Dawn* 'a run-of-the-mill RKO movie... for which Clifford Odets as a favour to me wrote the screenplay.' Odets had a better opinion of it. 'I'm not ashamed of that,' he said in 1963. 'It's a little mystery thriller. I see it; it has its living moments.'

Between 1942-48, Odets was a prolific Hollywood scenarist. He planned a biography of Beethoven for Charles Laughton, though how much was written is unclear. Margaret Brenman-Gibson credits him with unproduced screenplays for projects called *All Brides Are Beautiful*, *April Shower* and *The Whispering Cup* and, interestingly, an adaptation of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. She also lists Odets working uncredited on *Sister Kenny* (1946) and Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946). Unfortunately, there is no other record of Odets' involvement with the latter. And there is another project calling for further research: the complete Odets script for *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). Although Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett were hired for the final script, Frank Capra acknowledges in his autobiography, *The Name Above the Title*, that he retained Odets' early scenes.

Odets' West Coast days between 1942-48 exploded back on the New York stage as *The Big Knife* in 1949. The character of actor Charlie Castle is, unmistakably, a projection of the screenwriter Odets. But what exactly troubles Castle? The second-rate movies he has worked on? All Hollywood pictures? The compromised work ethic of Southern California? The sterile life in the sun? Failed personal relationships? (The dissolution of the Group?) As its many critics have observed, *The Big Knife* is as muddled and contradictory as Odets' own vacillating opinions of Hollywood. (Regrettably, the 1955 film, directed by Robert Aldrich, was foggy and ill-motivated, probably because it was too loyal to the original script.)

In 1952, Odets appeared before HUAC, named names and then described his own non-subversive occupation: 'To speak generally, I go to Hollywood to

make a living, not to write something . . . to demean or disgrace American people as I believe many people do. But to make an honest living, after writing entertaining scripts.' In 1955, after the death of his wife, Odets returned for good to Hollywood. He worried obsessively about having been a 'friendly' government witness. And he went back to writing screenplays.

Odets' chief disappointment in the years 1955-63 was that his monumental Biblical screenplay *Joseph and His Brethren* remained unproduced, even though Harry Cohn, president of Columbia, was an enthusiast. Frank Capra and Otto Preminger were asked to direct it, and Rita Hayworth was scheduled to star. Perhaps Odets' most challenging assignment in these years was to write (uncredited) the last scene of Nicholas Ray's *Bigger Than Life* (1956). What is to happen when James Mason wakes in hospital and realises, having suffered delusions of grandeur under a new wonder drug, that he tried to kill his son in imitation of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac? Odets' solution was disappointingly conventional: Mason wakes up healed and normal, realises his mistake and embraces his wife and son in reaffirmation of the 1950s nuclear family.

The best of the later screenplays is *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), a patented Odets story about the heated symbiotic relationship between a Broadway press agent and a big-time gossip columnist. For this script, revised from an earlier one by Ernest Lehman, Odets could run free with zesty New York dialogue and non-stop Runyanisms. Here are none of the conscience-stricken characters of *The Big Knife*. *Sweet Smell of Success* wisely stays among the show-business shills and heels: Sidney Falco (Tony Curtis), PR man supreme, 'the boy with the ice-cream face', and J. J. Hunsecker (Burt Lancaster), the Walter Winchell-like gossip maven, who brags 'My right hand hasn't seen my left hand for thirty years.'

In 1960, Odets both wrote and directed a picture for the first time since *None*

But the Lonely Heart. But *The Story on Page One* is two hours of tired and overacted courtroom drama which reveals, principally, that as Odets' politics grew more conservative, his vision of the working class grew more condescending. While Odets' films were claustrophobic, with their weak, compromised characters, the playwright himself began to speak out about the need for strong, uncontaminated national heroes. On 25 May 1952, six days after his final HUAC appearance, Odets eulogised John Garfield, who had just died aged 39, in a letter to the *New York Times*: 'He was as pure an American product as can be seen these days, processed by democracy, knowing or caring nothing for any other culture or race. . . His feeling never changed: that he had been mandated by the American people to go in there and "keep punching" for them.'

'One thing we need badly is heroes,' Odets told the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1958. 'As Emerson said, a hero must be a minority of one. He must be an ethical model who breaks the mould of conformity, but this is the age of conformity.' Four years later, he romanticised Marilyn Monroe in *Show* as a natural spirit who was ruined by the deprivations of her childhood, then callously treated by the studio system: 'That she could be sensitive, intuitive and with an animal wisdom far beyond them, most of the executives with whom she collided did not even dream.'

Odets' last screenplay was *Wild in the Country*, written for Elvis Presley in 1962. 'It pained me to hear him rationalise writing the screenplay,' Harold Clurman said, 'by declaring that Presley was something more than he seemed.' But was not Presley the perfect new Odets hero: the truck-driving country boy who keeps his Tennessee accent and Southern ways in homogenised Southern California? As the title suggests, the film is about a tearaway who keeps his rural integrity while all about him—bullying family, dishonourable townspeople—try to corrupt him, send him to jail, break his spirit. Yet there are

echoes of that unmistakable Odets voice. Presley (Glenn Taylor): 'Don't let your Pa beat your wings down.' Tuesday Weld: 'Your aim is to fly above me. But if you ever come tumbling down, I can wait!' And the solution to the hero's burden of social problems? He is packed off to a safe university to become a writer. The last cinematic image Odets leaves us is of Glenn Taylor walking awed into the halls of learning: *Elvis Goes to College*.

In 1963, Clifford Odets became a writer for the *Richard Boone Show*, suddenly evincing the same enthusiasm for television that he had expressed, at various times, for the movies. He died of cancer that same year aged 57. Dead in Hollywood.

Were his years in movies worth it? His old Group Theatre friends, those still left after HUAC, remained as angry about the sacrifice of talent as they had been when Odets sidled off to Hollywood in 1935. In August 1963, Harold Clurman wrote in the *New York Times*: 'Now think of . . . the little floozie in *The Big Knife*. The girl is a confused victim of the Hollywood industry. She is both sordid and pathetic. . . She is Odets' female alter ego.' According to Margaret Brenman-Gibson, 'Elia Kazan said he could have forgiven Clifford anything except the grievous waste of . . . time and talent in writing films.'

None But the Lonely Heart, yes, and that splendid script for *Sweet Smell of Success*. Otherwise the Group Theatre was right from the start: one of America's major playwrights became only an intriguing footnote among film-makers. He sold out. Having gone merely to look round, he ended by becoming Hollywood. He was cremated, appropriately enough, at Forest Lawn cemetery. Odets' friend Jean Renoir understood the ties that bind. 'When Clifford Odets died,' Renoir said, 'I thought I wanted to leave Hollywood. He was a prince. Every gesture, every way of thinking was noble. Although I love Hollywood, I have to say it is without nobility. But I stayed, of course.'

Sweet Smell of Success: Tony Curtis.



Wild in the Country: Elvis Goes to College.



BESTSELLER

Rider Haggard and the Cinema

King Solomon's Mines, Rider Haggard's first bestseller, was published in September 1885. During the next fifteen months 31,000 copies were sold, bringing Haggard royalties of over £750. His next book, *She*, was published on 1 January 1887 and sold even better.

These two books remained his best sellers throughout his long career, but he was to earn substantial amounts of money from later, apparently less successful books. In January 1887, for example, the *Illustrated London News* paid Haggard £1,650 solely for the British and Australian rights of *Cleopatra*. This sum helped boost his income from writing for 1887 to over £10,680, making him that year almost certainly Britain's best-paid novelist.

Such earnings owed much to the business acumen of A. P. Watt, Haggard's literary agent, who knew well what financial benefits could be obtained by selling the serial rights of a story to one of the ever growing number of magazines and journals then being published to cater for a reading public greatly enlarged by the State's recent introduction of compulsory education. In the twenty years after 1887 only one of Haggard's books—*Doctor Thorne*, his pro-vaccination tale—was not first published as a serial. The selling of these rights helped sustain Haggard's substantial income from writing until the end of the century.

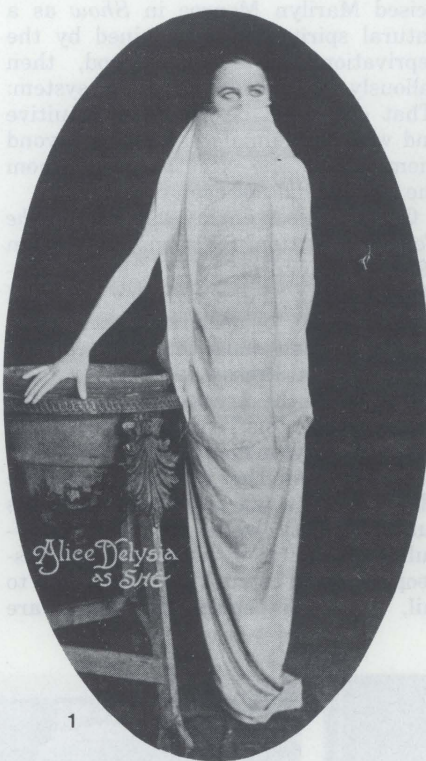
After 1900, Haggard involved himself more and more in public service, sitting on several Royal Commissions. His early high productivity (three manuscripts a year at times) declined and so, naturally, did his income. In the decade before 1914, the growing unionisation of workers produced higher wages which increased printing charges so that publishers were faced with either charging substantially more for the traditional hardback novel or relying on the mass-production of cheap editions. It was the latter solution that was adopted, and cheap editions and even cheaper reprints flooded the market. On these the author's royalties were likely to be no more than 7.5 per cent, compared with the 20 or 25 per cent that had been earlier received for the first printing of a hardback novel. None the less, Haggard in the years before 1914 was still earning from writing between £3,500 and £4,500 a year.

It was the First World War that adversely affected the fortunes of professional writers. As paper became scarce and its price soared, novels, including Haggard's, went out of print. The situation improved little even after the war.

Sydney Higgins

On the centenary of the first publication of *She*, Rider Haggard's biographer writes about his skirmishes with the film industry.

In September 1921, Haggard complained: 'I have just received a six months account of some books of mine which are published at 2/-, out of which a royalty of 1½d a copy is my share. Of these books about 68,000 were sold during the six months, but when publishers and other agents have had their



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cut, all I—the author—get for this great circulation is £302, of which again nearly half will be taken by the Income Tax.' Even greater problems were caused by the closure during the war of a vast number of magazines that failed to appear again in peacetime, so that the most profitable and ready source of income for many writers survived only on a much reduced scale.

Nor was the vast pool of prewar readers of popular fiction clamorously demanding more books. There was no longer the need, for between 1914 and 1918 the cinema had become the most popular form of entertainment. By the end of the war it was able to cater well for the audience previously served by cheap editions and picture magazines.

Literary agents and established writers were keen to sell stories to the new film industry.

By 1917 six of Haggard's books had been sold to H. L. Lucoque on a royalty basis. These were *King Solomon's Mines*, *She*, *Allan Quatermain*, *Montezuma's Daughter*, *Queen Sheba's Ring* and *Dawn*. The contracts have not survived and so the exact terms are unknown, but it appears that for the film rights of each book Haggard was paid £1,500 on



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account of a royalty of 12.5 per cent of the gross receipts. In such contracts the period was invariably restricted, normally to seven years. Thus for these six books Haggard would have received £9,000.

Despite the benefits arising from this new-found source of income, there were problems for writers. Many soon discovered that a film right sold did not mean that a film would be made, and it soon became apparent that some film companies were prepared to buy up rights solely to prevent rival companies getting hold of the story. If the book concerned was a bestseller with a limited life (which after 1918 increasingly became the case), there was little possibility of the film rights being sold to another company when the first option expired. As a result, the period of time for which rights were sold became shorter over the years. By the 1930s it was normally only three years, and



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country. It has great possibilities but it ought to be in the hands of artists and strictly upright men.'

Haggard also often disagreed with the producer's choice of actors. After seeing an Italian version of *Beatrice* he wrote on 20 April 1921: 'Why should the hero, Geoffrey, a man getting on for forty, with a powerful legal stamp of face, be impersonated by an oily-haired young person of about twenty-two?' Eventually Haggard realised that he was in a position to insist on approving aspects of the script, including the subtitles. He could not, however, fight against the censor, who was given at an early stage in the cinema's history the right to be the guardian of public morals.

On 25 October 1924 he wrote in his diary: 'I have been working against time engaged in entirely re-casting the subtitles of the film version of my Egyptian romance, *Moon of Israel*, which is to be produced very shortly... Some official

ganda, vulgar crime and corrupting innuendo to pass to the picture stage, but arrows sticking in Eastern murderers, or a poor dying woman clinging to her husband's breast, he finds corrupting. The fact is, as I believe, this Censorship is very badly managed. Such power should be given only to men of wide views and education, who look under the surface of things.'

Contracts signed long before films were thought about also subsequently caused many problems for writers, especially when dramatic rights had been involved. Haggard, for example, signed on 21 September 1887 a letter addressed to a Mr Rose giving him the sole and exclusive right to adapt the novel *She* for the stage in Great Britain. Astonishingly in 1925 the Rose Trustees successfully claimed that this agreement entitled them to a share of the royalties from any film version of *She*.

A fifth problem that seriously affected Haggard was created by film companies that stole stories without acknowledgment or payment. The result of Haggard's most important battle over such an incident is given in this extract from his diary, dated 21 October 1920: 'I am thankful to say that after about a year and a half of effort I have at last recovered £2,000 of the amount due to me, or rather the amount on which we compromised, from the American pirates, the Fox Company, for their purloining and exhibition of *Cleopatra*. Whether I shall get the rest I do not know.'

Despite all such difficulties, the financial benefits that the cinema brought to a popular writer like Haggard were obvious from its earliest days. The impact that films would make on the style and content of popular fiction was much less noticeable when Haggard died in 1925. But by then there had been changes in the novel. Freed of the controls imposed by serial publication, some novelists reacted with the self-indulgent pleasure enjoyed by the fat ladies of comic postcards once their corsets have been removed. Haggard in the postwar years was too set in his ways to react in such an unseemly manner. Yet interestingly the first of his books published after the First World War, *When the World Shook*, is one of his most original works. Hailed by some science fiction fans as a masterpiece, it tells of Oro who with his beautiful daughter guards a giant ball which as it tumbles along its subterranean path keeps the earth spinning on its correct axis. Strangely, the film rights of this book were never sold and now, like all Haggard's works, it is out of copyright. Perhaps that is just as well, for now there is no need to speculate whether it was Haggard's idea that inspired Spielberg to devise a remarkably similar scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. ■

Some sixteen silent films were based on Rider Haggard's novels. They included six versions of *She*, starting with Méliès' *La Danse du Feu* (1899), *Cleopatra* with Theda Bara (1917), *King Solomon's Mines* (1919) and *Die Sklavenkönigin* (*Moon of Israel*), made by Michael Curtiz in Austria in 1924.

Variations on *She*.

1. Alice Delysia (1916).
2. Betty Blythe (1925).
3. Helen Gahagan (1935).
4. Ursula Andress (1965).



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subsequently six months was not unknown, with an extension possible for an additional payment.

A second difficulty that has remained a source of annoyance to writers is that the film-makers, having acquired the rights, could make whatever alteration to the plot they thought necessary. This particularly annoyed Haggard. On 18 April 1921 he wrote in his diary: 'In a review of the film of *Stella Fregelius*, *The Times* talks of the "terrible anticlimax" due to the alteration of the end by the adaptors to make the picture play finish happily. This annoyed me so much that I have written to *The Times* a letter protesting against this tyranny of the "happy ending" convention.' On 31 October 1919 he wrote: 'I have been to Town today to see the private view of the film of *Allan Quatermain*. It is not at all bad but it might have been a great deal better. I wonder if the Cinema business will ever be adequately handled in this

from the Censor's Office has raised objections (1) to soldiers being shown with arrows sticking in them, (2) to too much of the heroine's back being visible in some scene (which I never noticed) and (3) to the warmth of the embrace which in the moment of her death, the heroine gives her husband, the Prince of Egypt. Evidently the Censor expects that even at such a solemn time ladies should be careful of the proprieties!

'What Pharisees and humbugs we are in England! No wonder the foreigners make a mock of us on this matter. The Censor allows much poisonous propa-



Comrades: Payday.

The Lanternist's Tale

Comrades/Jill Forbes

'Comrades, to whom our thoughts return/Brothers...' Bill Douglas has much in common with the author of those lines: populism tempered with virtuosity, the religion of his art and the courage of the apostate. Douglas is no more the hero of the right-thinking Left than Auden was a cadre of the Communist movement. Whatever the resonance of the title, *Comrades* (Curzon) is not a film about labour history, or even a film that is morally uplifting; it is a story about making sense of experience—highly political for that very reason although not, perhaps, in a way that designer socialism would recognise.

It is so long since Britain had a rural population of any size that the folk memories have long since departed. *Comrades* attempts to resurrect them, possibly with a degree of anachronism although that is unimportant, by situating its narrative just at the moment when the men of toil were ceasing to be the besmocked yokels of pastoral tradition and were coming to have a sense of their own worth. What more crucial to this than the value of work? The central scene in the Tolpuddle episode, therefore, is the weekly distribution of wages. Here we see the conflict between the literate, the illiterate and the becoming literate enacted with brilliant economy. As the paltry coins slide across the counter under the baleful gaze of the overseer (Murray Melvin), the labourers are required to sign the ledger in receipt. Half mark a cross and half their full name; half can count and half rely on the amount being signalled by their more numerate brethren; half submit with docility to the roll call imposed and half dispute with the overseer the alphabetical order in which he summons them

to receive their due. Knowledge is power, so it is said, and unity is strength...

What was it that instructed these men and gave them a sense of justice, against the one inflicted by the 'natural order of things'? Hunger, certainly, but also religion. Another scene, this time brilliant in its exploitation of stereophonic sound, dramatises the impact of non-conformism with its emphasis on individual responsibility and self-help, when one of the Martyrs literally runs out of the parish church in which the parson is intoning the ritual message that whatever is, is right, and 'goes over' to Methodism to find an amateur orator improvising in the chapel a sermon of hope and comfort. As he runs, the sound of one voice and one hymn is imperceptibly but unmistakably modulated into another until the new haven is reached.

These things are splendidly observed, as is the detail of the rural landscape—the hedges, ditches, barns and cottages, dress and furniture and even the animals. We are reminded in the Hardy-esque touches, such as silhouettes against a darkening landscape of figures watching the beacons light up across the hills, that Hardy himself was another determined nostalgic. We see the rich man in his hall and the poor man at the gate; the craftsman trapped by insufficient remuneration of a craft that today would earn him thousands of pounds and held there by the church's prohibition of Sunday labour.

But the most fascinating thing about the Tolpuddle Martyrs is that they were an anachronism in their own times. Not for nothing were they martyrs, their lives reduced for the purposes of moral fable to exemplary tableaux in the tra-

dition of the narratives preceding the novel. The implied narrator of this film is the *colporteur*, the man with the magic lantern show, moving from village to village peddling his ballads and his tales in pictures, while the implied viewer is a throwback to a past when simple stories aroused strong emotions, you knew whose side you were on and it was God's.

Another theme of Douglas' film is thus the development of popular, industrial entertainment, for just when the novel was discovering psychology and throwing off its simplistic moral mode, forms of industrial reproduction began to perpetuate its erstwhile regimes and genres—the images d'Epinal, the dioramas of the Battle of Waterloo or the Execution of Louis XVI, or indeed any scene of popular excitement. Of course, this is not the first time a film has attempted to look back into its own sources, but Douglas approaches the subject with a lightness of touch and an immensely appealing aestheticism. To take just one example, Michael Clarke, disguised as an itinerant performer, executes the Sailor's Hornpipe on a platform in the middle of a field, with such grace and agility that one could wish for a brief moment that the whole film had been enacted as ballet; for we, the modern sophisticated audience, are as spell-bound as the open-mouthed rustics.

The various travelling performers and entertainers, lanternists, owners of dioramas, circus masters, operators of patent steam heliotypes and, when the scene shifts to Australia, it is implied the colonial administrators themselves, are all, I believe, mobilised to suggest that somehow Tolpuddle was a last-ditch struggle destined almost to be won before it began because it caricatured the world that was swept away with the industrial revolution. It should not, after all, be forgotten that this episode was almost contemporaneous with the first Reform Bill and that the influence of the London-Dorchester Committee, or the industrial lobby, was such that the Martyrs were brought back from transportation and feted precisely on the London stage.

Comrades is a big film on a broad canvas, authentically located in Dorset and Australia, which will come as quite a shock to some admirers of Douglas' intimist autobiographical pieces. There is the same brilliant exploitation of faces and physical types; invidious as it may be to single out any individual, Robin Soans' George Loveless will surely go down in cinema history as a great performance. There are also the same moments of slapstick which surprise and delight by their unexpectedness. Another clever touch is to use the well-known faces—the Robert Stephenses, James Foxes, Vanessa Redgraves—for the bit parts, the nobs that ordinary folk look up to. By contrast, the narrative exposition does not shine by its clarity, and I seriously wonder how many of

those who had not already boned up on the history will have come away from the film with even a minimal grasp of the names of the principals, let alone what happened to them. Ellipsis is a fine and private thing, but surely not in the popular cinema?

I also query the length of the Australian sequences. They are not uncharacteristic of Douglas, to be sure: admirers of the trilogy will remember those Egyptian scenes forever; and it is also true that

the colonial system was the ultimate cause of the fall in agricultural wages. But the connection is never made explicit here—nor could it be in this kind of film—and while there must be a fascinating movie to be made on the British in the Australian outback, *Comrades* surely is not it. Perhaps, indeed, Auden should have the last word: 'Comrades/Remember that in each direction/Love outside our own election/Holds us in unseen connection/O trust that ever.' □

The way we weren't

'Round Midnight/Alan Stanbrook

No doubt about it, Bertrand Tavernier's *'Round Midnight* (Columbia-Cannon-Warner) packs a terrific emotional punch. The redemption of rundown jazz musician Bud Powell through the good offices of idolising French commercial artist Francis Paudras is one of those inspirational stories calculated not to leave a dry eye in the house. When, in the last scene, the rock musicians of a later generation pay tribute in concert to this master of be-bop and Tavernier's swooning camera cranes up above the arena, the audience is left wallowing in as warm a glow as at the end of *The Glenn Miller Story*.

None of this cut any ice with the festival jury at Venice. They snubbed it utterly on prize-giving day, leaving outraged foreign critics protesting about a major injustice. *'Round Midnight* sets out, among other things, to right the wrongs done in the name of jazz by pictures like *Paris Blues* and even *New York, New York*. Here are no charismatic movie stars draped round the tourist attractions of Paris, but real life musicians bedded down squalidly in indistinguishable hotel rooms and apartments (crochery piled mile-high in the bidet). And they really play jazz instead of mounting a clever pastiche, as De Niro did for Martin Scorsese.

For this Tavernier scores high marks, but to jazz fans he gets just about everything else perversely wrong. For a start, he makes the Bud Powell character (here called Dale Turner and patterned at least partly on saxophonist Lester Young) play tenor sax rather than the piano. No reason, of course, why fiction should follow the facts, but if so many details are identifiable with Powell—the arrival in Paris in 1959, the associations with Paudras and Miss Buttercup, the bouts of insanity, the missed flight out of New York—so fundamental a departure from the truth is irritating.

Musically, Tavernier admits that he has cheated. Much of the playing belongs stylistically to a period somewhat later than 1959. Why? There is a curious interlude, too, in which Turner is joined in concert by an old flame got up for all the world like Billie Holiday in dazzling

white lace and with a gardenia in her hair. But who is this impostor (called Darcey Leigh in the film)? Lady Day, after all, died in 1959 in far worse shape than actress Lonette McKee, who plays the part.

This is not the only time the truth is set aside for a more glamorous alternative. Even geography is distorted. The famous Blue Note club, reproduced down to the last carpet tack inside, was relocated because the street in which it actually stood (the rue d'Artois) is visually uninteresting. The Blue Note set is the centrepiece of one of the most controversial elements of the film. The predominantly blue and gray production design by the veteran Alexandre Trauner (intended, so far as colour permits, to evoke old black and white photographs) incorporates a street scene of extraordinary detail and richness, with every puddle and trashcan placed and lit to perfection. *C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas '59*. The atmosphere is redolent of the Carné-Prévert films for which Trauner designed such elaborate sets before the war. They worked then because the entire films took place in them.

Here they reek of artifice because they are part of a tradition long gone even in 1959 and because they have to do battle with other real locations—the Seine, the Normandy beaches and the East River in Manhattan.

The New York scenes introduce one of the film's more bizarre pieces of casting. As Powell and Paudras make the trip back to the Big Apple, there erupts into the calm, elegiac mood Tavernier has adopted up to that point a whirling dervish of a performance from Martin Scorsese as the owner of the celebrated Birdland club. Scorsese is the star turn of the picture but he belongs in a different one. Full of tics, mannerisms and wolfish leers, his performance is the most blatant camera hogging. While he is on the screen, *'Round Midnight* ceases to feel as if Tavernier is in control and skitters off into Scorsese country.

Tavernier is much more successful in keeping the leash on Dexter Gordon, the 62-year-old tenor saxophonist whom he cast in the Powell role. Tall as a steeple, gruff as emery paper, he dominates the picture physically and with that amalgam of sweetness and wisdom that makes it easy to understand the personal magnetism Powell had for Paudras. Some, however, might consider that his playing has seen better days; Paudras' starstruck readiness to listen to it for hours on end in the street in a Parisian downpour has to be taken as given.

Despite a rather colourless performance by François Cluzet as Paudras (simply called Francis in the film), the relationship between the two men emerges as the most compelling feature of the story. Francis' efforts to keep Dale Turner physically and artistically in one piece—watering down the wine, driving off a sinister dope-pusher—come to seem increasingly connubial. Only half in jest, Powell/Turner calls him 'Lady Francis' in return.

'Round Midnight: Dexter Gordon (Dale Turner).



That there are casualties of such a single-minded obsession and infatuation Tavernier does not disguise. Neither Francis' estranged wife nor his daughter Berangère receives the love that is her due. They become mere instruments in what he sees as a wider destiny. Turner, too, thanks to his nomadic life, finds he can no longer relate to his own daughter, who has become a stranger to him. 'Don't let that happen to you and Berangère,' he pleads. The pattern of echoes between the two men's lives is most skilfully and affectingly delineated.

In Dexter Gordon's slow speech, punctuated with pauses through which Tavernier had to wait patiently for the pearls to drop, there is wit and common

sense. Many of the aphorisms were suggested by the actor himself and some (like 'happiness is a nice wet reed') hit the bell clean and true. Others, verging on the banal or the pretentious, are smartly undercut with a neat line in self-mockery. The snag is that, even with a healthy dose of deflation, the script often crosses the line between the simple and the simple-minded. 'The world is inside nothing,' concludes Dale Turner portentously after ruminating on the way life can be peeled like an onion. 'I don't know whether I like that, but you'd better write it down.' If they had been sterner with themselves script-writers Tavernier and David Rayfel might have thought better of it. □

and jealousy—and on to himself, rehearsing his 'act' before a mirror at the end, finding peace by losing himself in the reflection. It may be a perverse redemption, being led from the darkness of blind instinct into the light of a purely projected self, a sublimated self; it is redemption by an act of cinematic will. Eddie is doing all his projecting on to others at the beginning of *The Color of Money*. He characterises himself as 'a student of human moves' when he first picks up Vince, seeing in him a remarkable talent which can't be left to define itself. 'Pool excellence is not about excellent pool,' says Eddie. 'It's about being someone.' The someone he sets about turning Vince into is another image of the success he has become since he gave up pool to become a liquor salesman and stakehorse for other players, someone whose success is calculated for its effect on others. 'He'll be watching you and he'll come to you,' as Eddie tells Vince, instructing him how to set up the local champion they intend to hustle in that Midwest pool hall.

It's a corrupt projection of the self Eddie once was, or of the self he once 'saw'. Talking to his girlfriend after first meeting Vince, Eddie muses, 'That kid tonight—it was like watching home movies.' In both *Raging Bull* and *Mean Streets*, 'home movies' were part of the story, irreducible evidence of some authentic condition, all the more authentic, in a way, because the evidence gives away so little; it all depends on how you look at those flickering images. Eddie's rediscovery of an authentic self then becomes linked, like La Motta's passage into the light, with the humiliation of making a spectacle of himself. Eventually tempted into a game himself, Eddie is taken by a jovial hustler and loses ignominiously in front of Vince ('I showed you my arse in there'). After which he abandons the boy to find his

Once a contender

The Color of Money/Richard Combs

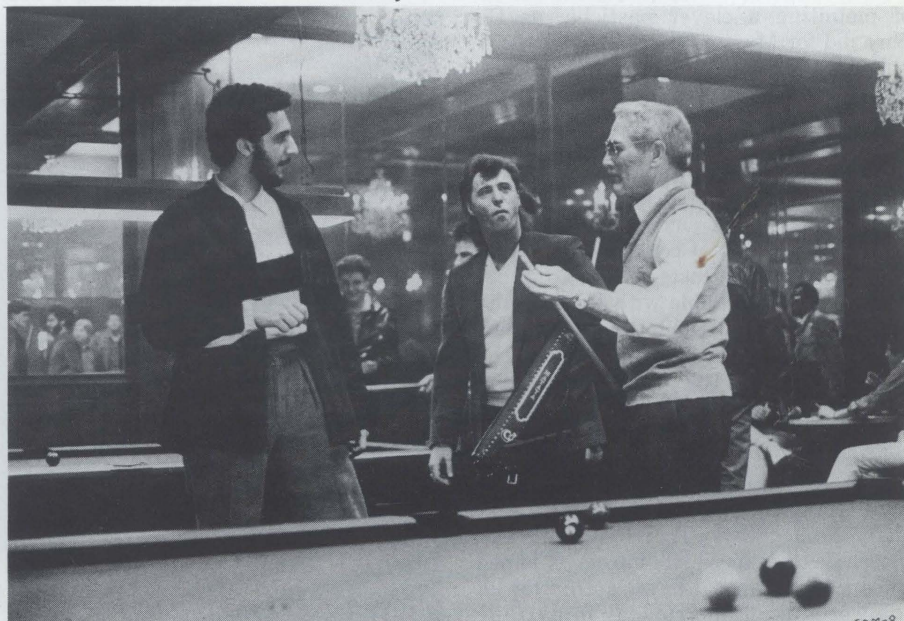
The Color of Money (Touchstone) is about halfway through before the Hustler, 'Fast' Eddie Felson (Paul Newman), does anything serious with a pool cue. Martin Scorsese, directing the sequel to a movie that was made when he was still a teenager, signals the moment with a kind of twenty-one-gun salute. Eddie, en route to a tournament in Atlantic City with a young protégé, Vincent Lauria (Tom Cruise), stops off at a seedy Midwest pool hall of his past acquaintance to show Vince how to set up a little hustle with the local talent. Starting a game to catch the other players' eye, Eddie approaches the pool table for the first time in the movie as something other than an observer, a 'stakehorse', a wheeler dealer, and as he breaks the rack, Scorsese makes the shot resound like a thunderclap, a fusillade. It signals Eddie's return to the arena, but it also sounds like a declaration of war—against his opponents and against the enemy within himself, who ruled himself out of the game twenty-five years ago when he refused to allow his gangster-connected manager (George C. Scott in *The Hustler*) to take half his winnings. So the shot resounds on more than just a physical level. As Scorsese has put it: 'The movie is about a deception and then a clarity, a perversion and then a purity.'

Both the sound effect and the theme are instantly reminiscent of *Raging Bull*, where punches thrown in the ring, and even flash bulbs going off in between bouts, had a thunderous wallop. What Scorsese did in his boxing bio-pic he does here, finding ways to express the anger, the frustration, the hunger of his contenders rather than just charting the state of play. When Eddie, unexpectedly but inevitably, has to face Vince at the tables in Atlantic City, the game becomes not the sequence of cliffhanging shots a conventional sports movie might go for but a ballet of colliding projectiles,

in which one doesn't follow the match but experiences the play of shot (in both the pool and film senses) against shot. The dazzling energy of the sequence, as of all Scorsese's film-making, leads at the same time straight to an ambivalence—to two-way declarations of war, asserting while denying the self; to the physicality/spirituality split, asserting needs or wishes which are simultaneously repressed, punished or purified. It may be so powerful because it is such a fundamental movie impulse, having to do with the business of watching movies, with 'vision' as both active projection and passive reception, as both physical act and spiritual metaphor.

It's a natural impulse, anyway, to be dramatised by movies about spectator sports. *Raging Bull*'s Jake La Motta is purified when his 'impure' gaze is turned from others—his opponents in the ring, the obscure objects of his sexual desire

The Color of Money: Paul Newman (Eddie Felson).



Blanche

Thérèse/Tom Milne

own way to Atlantic City while he sets about the regeneration of himself and his game. The change in Eddie is signalled by two shots, one during a crucial game of Vince's and one during his own semi-final in the tournament, in which his impassive expression is surrounded by a kaleidoscopic image, dissolves of the match in progress or the swirling background created by a ceaselessly circling camera. Eddie is no longer watching but meditating, as one character puts it. He is no longer projecting on to others; he has withdrawn into his own home movie.

The outcome, then, is a happier one for Eddie than for Jake La Motta, in that he both finds redemption and gets back into the game. Which means that the act of cinematic will this time has the air less of spiritual perversity than of commercial deliberation. One can see why Scorsese and his scriptwriter Richard Price virtually abandoned Walter Tevis' original novel, with its discursive, picaresque account of Eddie coming back from enforced retirement, a man out of his time (like Newman's Butch Cassidy) in his attachment to straight pool when all the young hot-shots are playing nine-ball (and even eight-ball). But their own version has become discursive in its turn, with the cross-country trip and the ambiguities of the father-son relationship having less to do with the fraternal angst of *Mean Streets* or *Raging Bull* than the films, say, of Arthur Penn (Newman again in *The Left-Handed Gun*). *The Color of Money* is an exciting, brilliantly filmed coda to *The Hustler*, but also something of a dream resolution to the earlier film—which may, in fact, have been the more perfect Scorsese film. There Eddie Felson was already less than pure in his practice of his art, and his redemption—sublimating himself by turning away from the game—may, like Jake La Motta's, have had more spiritual rigour. □

On the face of it, nothing easier to understand than the adjective 'Bressonian' already widely used to describe the sense of muted beatification attendant upon the cloistered life in Alain Cavalier's *Thérèse* (Cannon). In a series of placidly pregnant tableaux laid demurely end-to-end, Cavalier offers an impressionistic account of the short and happy martyrdom of Ste Thérèse of Lisieux, who at her own urgent insistence entered a Carmelite convent at the age of fifteen, died there in 1897 aged twenty-four from tuberculosis hastened by rigorous deprivations, and was canonised in 1925 after becoming—as 'The Little Flower'—the spiritual darling of the trenches during the First World War.

Yet, far from being a hagiography, the film is a study of human vulnerability in which the calm certitudes of Bresson's 'All Is Grace' are light years away. A mere child, Thérèse (Catherine Mouchet in a performance of marvellous candour) is introduced in two tableaux which inform everything that follows. In the first, she and her sister wait while their benignly adoring father carefully coddles their beds with a warming-pan. In the second, Thérèse hops out of bed to pray for the repentance of a convicted murderer. Subsequently learning from a newspaper that although he rejected the ministrations of a priest on his way to the guillotine, the condemned man did indeed kiss the cross, Thérèse delightedly credits herself with a miracle (the only semblance of one throughout the film): 'Je l'ai sauvé!'

Cherished, petted, dazzled by adolescent dreams in which Christ takes shape as her romantic Lochinvar,

Thérèse then moves heaven and earth, even going so far as to buttonhole the Pope, in her eagerness to be permitted to enter the Carmelite convent at Lisieux despite her unusually tender age. Indulgent as ever, although he has already lost two daughters to the convent and evil gossip suggests that he would be happy to be rid of all four, her father makes no demur. But alone in bed at night, he suddenly pulls the sheet over his head and cries out his pain: 'O Seigneur, que votre amour est féroce.'

It is around this intransigence of divine love that the whole film is organised, filling it with the sense not that all is grace, but that all is loss. Still a child and buoyed by the confidence of childhood, Thérèse remains serenely assured that the heavenly bridegroom to whom she was wed in the ceremonial pastiche of white brocade gown, garland and veil, will return after his seeming abandonment of her. But the older nuns are mired in a sort of limbo, either adrift in the void (like the tetchy Mother Superior, haplessly aware of her own lack of serenity), or secretly filling it (like the aged nun treasuring a forbidden portrait of the husband who died before she entered the convent), or attempting to breach it (like Sister Lucie, physically attracted to Thérèse and inspired by her imminent death into fleeing the convent). Nowhere is the sense of aching unfulfilment more vividly expressed than in a charmingly quirkish Christmas tableau, where a rude artisan intrudes upon the convent, bringing a gift of champagne, an unseasonal greeting ('Vive la République!'), and a model of the infant Jesus for the Nativity crib which the nuns, quickly rendered a mite tidily, coo over and cradle in their arms.

The point is beautifully capped in a tableau where Thérèse's father, now paralysed and left speechless by a stroke, is brought to visit his daughters in a wheelchair. Heartrendingly impassive, yet with their yearning almost sparking alight across the forbidden gap, he and Thérèse stare mutely at each other through the grille while his gift—three little fish he had caught that morning, wrapped in a handkerchief—is tolerantly acknowledged. Silently, in a gesture of despair that no one present understands, he drapes the handkerchief over his head in exact imitation of his earlier gesture with the sheet. *O Seigneur, que votre amour est féroce.*

Throughout, in fact, objects of religious significance or symbolism—like these fish, or like the eucharist which Thérèse spits out in a fit of coughing during communion—are rejected as meaningless. What is treasured by the heart is the relic of human warmth, tenderness and passion: the old nun's portrait of her

Thérèse: Catherine Mouchet.



husband, the tear gathered by Thérèse on a scrap of cloth from a dead nun's cheek, the silver-paper shoe of armour which Lucie appropriates after Thérèse's masquerade as Saint Joan, this handkerchief of her father's which Thérèse lovingly washes, irons, and vainly asks to be allowed to keep. It is no accident that, unlikely as this might seem in reality, the offices for this convent are repeatedly drawn from 'The Song of Solomon'. Without ever being anticlerical as such—after all, even 'The Song of Solomon' has been expounded as an allegory of the union between Christ and His Church—Cavalier's film nevertheless privileges profane rather than sacred love. Its progenitor is not Bresson but Borowczyk, unmistakably present in the haunting, enigmatic intimation of troubled emotions. □

Time away

Castaway

Richard Combs

'This is real life,' warns Gerald Kingsland (Oliver Reed), meeting the woman, Lucy Irvine (Amanda Donohoe), who has answered his advertisement for a 'wife' to live for a year on a tropical island. It's a warning not to be carried away by the fabrications of *Robinson Crusoe*, as Gerald lists all the preparations and precautions necessary even to subsistence survivors in uninhabited paradise. But then *Castaway* (Columbia-Cannon-Warner) has already opened with an illustration of fiction's most famous castaway, as if to key the audience's mind as well into the fantasy that must precede this experience. And the point of Nicolas Roeg's film might be that this both is and isn't real life, that somewhere in between, coming and going, is where most lives are spent, or that the 'real' might be tucked away somewhere inaccessible, even when living naked on a beach.

Gerald has already spun out his own *Crusoe* fantasy, with *Girl Friday* trimmings: 'Give me a woman that can cook, sew, put up a tent, fish.' There's even a hint of more prosaic fantasies, with Eastern sultan or *Playboy* trimmings, in the way he solemnly confides to Lucy, talking about the answers he has had to his advertisement, 'You're definitely going to be on my shortlist...' Lucy is not given the opportunity to elaborate on what her fantasy of this might be, but perhaps it is suggested anyway by the first shots of her going to work in the early morning rush hour, walking through drab city streets to the offices of the Inland Revenue, District 3. Gerald is already into his fantasy (literally, in an early scene of him in among the fishes, guiding some schoolchildren through the swimming baths, or admiring a

terrarium that features a bronzed palm tree and thatched hut), but Lucy has to appropriate hers, and therein lies the first hint of trouble in paradise.

The appropriation is also literal. On an underground train, Lucy picks up a copy of the London listings magazine, *Time Out*, that carries Gerald's advertisement. Later, when someone in her office also picks up the magazine, Lucy claims it back with some irritation. After she and Gerald arrive on their island—Tuin, off the northernmost tip of Australia—these different fantasies not surprisingly take on a different reality. For Gerald, who has done this sort of thing before, the island is less a self-sufficient escape from past experience than an extension of it, less a chance to discover himself than to luxuriate in the sense of who he is. For Lucy, whose need of escape is greater, it is an all-absorbing experience, one against which she measures herself—and also Gerald, whom she quickly finds wanting. Early arguments about practical matters—such as his dilatoriness in putting up a shelter to replace their makeshift tent—soon settle into a more elemental and inexplicable hostility, that of man/woman perhaps, or of any estranged couple living apart together.

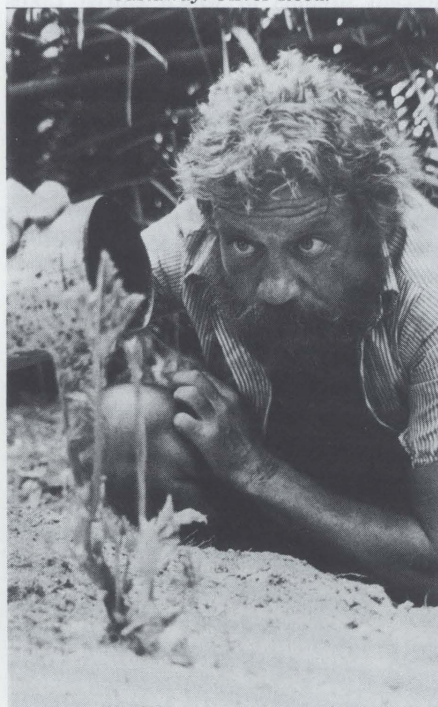
The social and domestic comedy aspects come to the fore towards the end of their stay. Gerald, whose interest in the island is only an aspect of his past restlessness, is eventually seduced away from Tuin by contact with the inhabitants of a nearby island, Badu. He becomes their mechanic, handyman, general Mr Fixit, until even the beach at Tuin is strewn with the debris of his new trade, prompting Lucy's complaint, 'We've got a bloody garden suburb, where people bring their lawnmowers to

be repaired.' Seeing the sanctity of her home violated, Lucy resorts to what the original Lucy Irvine, in her account of her year in paradise, called an 'age-old feminine device'. Having refused up to now to have sex with Gerald on Tuin (either the core or just the most obvious manifestation of their hostility), she sets out to seduce him back—with lacy black underwear that probably exceeds whatever *Playboy* fantasy Gerald was sketching in his mind at their first meeting in a Russell Square hotel. This couple's extraordinary year abroad is caught in the end on some of the most conventional snags of relationships. *Castaway* is the story of Gerald's attempt to remove the inverted commas round the word 'wife' in his advertisement, and of Lucy's to keep them in place.

Characteristically, where Lucy Irvine's account begins with their arrival on Tuin, Roeg's film moves back to the beginnings of their adventure in London—to emphasise, once we get to the naked beach, that all human life is here. Most strikingly, apart from the crosscutting between parallel lives about to meet, these early scenes are filled with a hubbub of sights and sounds that make up the texture of city life (traffic and weather reports; *The Pumpkin Eater*, a film about the extraordinary in ordinary human wants, on tv; the Yorkshire Ripper; the Pope being shot; Charles and Di being married). But there are also going to be echoes on Tuin—'How I Escaped Rapist Curate' reads a newspaper headline in London; 'Outback Family in Sheepdip Massacre' says its equivalent down under—in the violence, the incommunicability, the unknowability that the necessities of a couple bonding together for sheer survival can't disguise. One resentful discussion centres on her attempt to winkle out what he thinks about (Gerald's secret reading includes the *Penguin Buddhist Scriptures*, Colin Wilson's *A Criminal History of Mankind*, and a yellow-jacketed *Teach Yourself to Express Yourself*), finally declaring that his whole character, the boozy male braggadocio, is a lie. He ripostes that 'Everybody has their secret lives, where even their secrets have secrets.'

It's a common Roeg theme—that everything is here yet nothing is known—and *Castaway* is in many ways its most extreme statement. It is perhaps the least dramatic of his films (and in that sense has the least in common with the other film, *Don't Look Now*, on which screenwriter Allan Scott has worked for Roeg), the lives of these castaways being quite uneventful, except for the fundamental event of survival. Their physical deterioration parallels the collapse of their emotional partnership, even in a way parodies it. Lucy, most immersed in the island experience, receives the sharpest jolt from the idea that 'this might be the place where we die', while Gerald potters on with his tomato plants

Castaway: Oliver Reed.



and prays for rain. Given the lack of any story beyond the minutiae of living, *Castaway* is split more than any other Roeg film between its unknowable interior and the busyness with which all the minutiae is assembled, the distinctive artificial style which combs through and rearranges all the signs of life on Tuin.

The artificiality here is just about equalised—a delicate balancing act, on the edge of self-parody—by the ‘artificiality’ in other senses of the

island experience. What emphasises this is the underlying structure of *Castaway*, its dramatic interest outside story, which has less in common than one might expect with something like *Walkabout* (which is close territorially and in the theme of a ‘civilised’ incursion into the wild). Closer, perhaps, is *Performance* or *Eureka* which—accepting that no man (or woman) is an island—are based on the idea of a powerful but sterile isolate being threatened by/inviting invasion from a destructive/revivifying

other. The peculiarity of *Castaway* is that—although there are incursions from outsiders (two Australians on a catamaran, two ministering nuns)—both isolate and invader are already ensconced here. Gerald and Lucy stand in this basic antagonism towards each other, incorporating both roles in relation to each other. In this strange, artificial polarity—again finely teetering between comedy and self-parody—the film sums up the man/woman quandary on Tuin. □

Friends and relations

Smooth Talk/John Pym

The story can be briefly put. Connie, aged 15, pretty as a postcard, does not get on with her parents. Her mother opens her mouth only to criticise; her father, a soft smiling man, defers easily. This is faded Steinbeck California: sun-cracked clapboard houses, orchards carpeted with forgotten apples; but also a modern California seamed with ‘Valley Girl’ customs: glittering shopping malls, as exotic as a South Seas paradise, where the young hang out, larking rather than shopping, and where cinemas come in multiples of ten.

One summer Sunday, Connie (Laura Dern) is left sulkily at home, while the rest of the family, having made no great effort to change her mind, go to a neighbour’s barbecue. The girl kicks her heels. Arnold Friend (Treat Williams), a stranger, pulls up in his convertible. In the passenger seat is a simpleton named Ellie (in another incarnation he might have been called Lenny) who cradles a radio to his ear for security. Arnold, a man where previously all her friends and acquaintances have been unfledged teenagers, wants Connie to come for a drive. He persuades and persuades. In the end, she agrees. Ellie is left behind to poke about the house. There is a calm single shot of the car in a field. Later, Arnold drops Connie at her front gate. The family, suspecting nothing, have returned from the barbecue. Everything has changed, for ever.

Smooth Talk (Artificial Eye) is faithfully adapted, with telling embellishments, from a 20-page story by Joyce Carol Oates, ‘Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?’. The story is lightly told and deceptively inconsequential. It ends thus, with Connie about to get into Arnold Friend’s car: “My sweet little blue-eyed girl,” he said in a half-sung sigh that had nothing to do with her brown eyes but was taken up just the same by the vast sunlit reaches of the land behind him and on all sides of him—so much land that Connie had never seen before and did not recognise except to know that she was going to it.

In the film, written by Tom Cole, Arnold utters that clinching mock-sentimental line, but it is Connie herself who retorts, under her breath for us but not him to hear, ‘What if my eyes were brown?’ She is, we realise, entering those ‘vast sunlit reaches’ of her own free will despite Arnold Friend’s smooth talk. The clapboard house, the mall, her parents, are once and for all behind her. The film, however, adds a moral coda. Connie walks pensively up the drive then, matters having been mended with her mother, goes to her room. The delicate closing shot has Connie dancing with her favoured, less pretty sister. Her self-centredness begins to crack.

If this sounds fey and self-indulgent, it isn’t. Joyce Chopra, an award-winning documentarist who has made several studies of adolescent girls (and, to even the balance, a portrait of Matina Horner, president of Radcliffe College), knows her subject and has no illusions about

the trials of living with teenagers. She has a sharp if dry sense of humour and directs with elegant concision.

Connie’s mother (Mary Kay Place) has weary mother’s eyes which don’t miss a trick. She is sharp and ironical, but not unkind, though her younger daughter does not yet know this. She has her own preoccupations: sisters, to whom she is always on the telephone (she holds the receiver as Ellie holds his radio); a summer job, painting the house, which she is unable to finish because Connie, after a day at the mall, has forgotten to buy a roller and pan.

Joyce Chopra’s subject is the turbulence of adolescence; but this hackneyed theme is, thankfully, put in perspective by sideviews of other lives. Sex is the main subject, of course; but the subtext, the tedium of never lifting your sights from yourself, is far more intriguing. Connie’s father (Levon Helm) is surrounded by women: two daughters, a wife in trousers, his wife’s sisters, his daughters’ girlfriends. He has opted out, retired amiably enough into himself. It is not that he has not lifted his eyes, rather that he has ceased to see what is going on around him.

What really distinguishes this handsome, beautifully played film, however, and what marked the story too, is that it is not exactly what it seems. Arnold Friend, despite his name, is real enough. He is glimpsed before his appearance at the house at a roadside hamburger joint daringly visited by Connie and her chum Laura. But there is a hint that just possibly he and Ellie may be the fantasy of a summer afternoon: the knight, politely chivalrous, and his crossgrained squire. She half wants this friend, and half fears him.

The ambiguous dreamlike tone of this sequence is the film’s principal achievement. Arnold never offers Connie violence, though he hints at the flimsiness of the screen door which separates them. He is nevertheless irresistible, and the fear of what he might do to her finally and paradoxically provides her with the excuse to overcome her fears and to go with him of her own free will. To have succeeded in conveying these complicated, contradictory emotions with delicacy and authority marks Joyce Chopra and her husband Tom Cole as a team to be watched. □

Smooth Talk: Laura Dern (right).



Boo!

THE AURUM FILM ENCYCLOPAEDIA: HORROR

edited by Phil Hardy
Aurum Press/£18.95

THE DEAD THAT WALK
by Leslie Halliwell
Grafton/£12.95

THE PENGUIN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF HORROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL
edited by Jack Sullivan
Viking/£14.95

An immense pleasure is provided in certain travel books by their accounts of ghastly places that one never wants to go to. The contributors to Phil Hardy's delightful *Horror Encyclopaedia* achieve much the same for the cinema. I would never, except at the point of a chainsaw, see *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982), but I greatly enjoyed the entry on this 'belated and conspicuously low-budget addition to the teenage massacre cycle begun by *Halloween*.' The film, we are informed somewhat desperately, is 'chiefly notable for echoing *The Driller Killer* (1979) in featuring a maniac at large with an electric drill.'

Like the previous volumes in the 'Aurum Film Encyclopaedia' series (on Westerns and science fiction), this book provides a history of a genre through its films, arranged alphabetically by year. The book is heavily weighted towards the present, with the last fifteen years consuming half the text. This may seem excessive, but it provided space for the more delightful entries. For example, the robustly titled *Los Ritos Sexuales del Diablo* (1981), whose director, 'simply uses satanism and possession as a narrative excuse to show sodomy, bestiality with goats, orgies and even less savoury happenings.' (My italics.)

There is a coherent aesthetic behind this emphasis. The history of the horror film has been seen as a decline from a form with roots in expressionism and the Gothic to a vehicle designed largely to frighten teenage girls in middle-American drive-ins so much that they will throw their arms around their eager swains. But in Phil Hardy's view horror films have remained consistent in their function. *The Bride of Frankenstein*, *Psycho* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are all articulations of the dark sides of their societies, subversive statements that could

only be tolerated in such a relatively despised genre. This is both an interesting argument and a shrewd rationale for the reference book, a theory according to which all horror films become important.

Some are less important than others, however. Among those that receive short shrift are 'classics' like *The Mummy*, *King Kong* and the 'much overpraised' *Dracula* (by whom? Certainly not by any of the books under review). Popular recent films like *Jaws*, *Alien* and *Dressed to Kill* receive relatively brief treatment. And though, in an appendix, Peter Nicholls chooses *Don't Look Now* as one of his top ten horror films, and *Un Sussurro nel Buio*, a 'demonic-child movie, derived from Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*', receives an entry, there is no entry for *Don't Look Now* itself.

There's a real point to this though. Hardy's theory would suggest, and there is some truth in it, that when horror reaches the mainstream it becomes pretentious and self-conscious; Whale, Lewton, Fisher and Corman had a freedom in their backwaters that would, paradoxically, have been denied to them by larger budgets. The danger is that cheapness can become a virtue in itself.

The text is sprinkled with intriguing nuggets of information. For example, the genuinely notorious *Snuff* was made by the husband and wife team, Michael and Roberta Findlay, 'to cash in on the Manson murders'. The film proved unreleasable until some years later 'Allan Shackleton of Monarch' tacked on 'a four-minute sequence in which a woman is brutally and systematically mutilated, dismembered and disembowelled.' What the Findlays thought of this tampering is not recorded, but the entry concludes with a terse summary of their later careers: 'Michael Findlay was later decapitated in a gruesome helicopter accident on the top of the Pan-Am building in New York, while Roberta went on to make numerous exploitation and porn films...'

Strange and appalling worlds are revealed in this book, and if the boundary between intentional and unintentional humour is not always clear and its judgment not always to be trusted, it can still be heartily recommended, as a work of reference and a most enjoyable book to dip into. The principal contributors, Tom Milne and Paul Willemen (assisted by Verina Glaessner, Julian Petley and Tim Palleine), have done a fine job.

There is a creature not mentioned in the Aurum Encyclopaedia which has been stalking the film world for many years. A semi-legendary creature,

which rarely ventures out of the darkness. It is seemingly immortal and has even made a successful transition to television where it wields fearsome powers. It has evoked strong, hostile emotions in filmgoers, though in some it has inspired an odd affection and awe. Its name is Leslie Halliwell.

His latest book, *The Dead That Walk*, is an amiable, unpretentious account of Frankenstein, *Dracula* and the Mummy. He describes the pre-cinematic history of the characters with copious quotations from the various sources. Most of the author's contribution is made up of jaunty plot summaries linked in a most leaden fashion: 'At the box office *Dracula* was now distinctly subject to the law of diminishing returns; a little fresh blood had to be injected somehow.' Blood—*Dracula*, get it?

Halliwell is a film buff rather than a critic; his speciality is the interesting fact rather than the acute observation. One such fact presented here is that 'Even in *The Life of Emile Zola*, no mention of Dreyfus' [Jewish] heritage is permitted.' In fact, at the film's moment of crisis when the French high command decide to make Dreyfus the scapegoat, the camera cuts to the document in his file on which is written 'Religion: Jew.'

The only parts of the book that really justify its appearance are those which reproduce extracts from the script of *The Bride of Frankenstein*, that were (quite rightly) removed before shooting started. What is most disappointing is that Halliwell conveys little of the enthusiasm even for his favourite horror films that Phil Hardy's team displays for such monstrosities as *Much Ado About Murder* or *The Vampire Orgy*.

For readers who want a book that covers the whole field of horror, with entries ranging from Poe to Rondo Hatton, Gothic Romances to Slasher Movies, *The Penguin Encyclopaedia of Horror and the Supernatural* is the book to choose. It lacks the crazed enthusiasm and humour of the Aurum Encyclopaedia but it is more level-headed and more reliable. There are even entries on some films, such as *Let's Scare Jessica to Death* ('poetic and persuasive... one of the cinema's greatest ghost stories'), which Phil Hardy omits altogether. It also scores by having entries on B-Movies and 'The Pits of Terror', an amusing piece by Ramsey Campbell on bad horror movies.

The *Penguin Encyclopaedia* is a most useful reference work, but it is Phil Hardy's book that one will dip into for such entries as *Mother's Day*, a story of two

psychopathic hillbillies who in the end 'are done to death by radio aerial, electric meat carver, a can of Drano sink cleaner and a TV set.' 'Oddly enough,' the entry concludes, 'the film was banned in Britain.' They should never have used the TV set.

SEAN FRENCH

Ancient and modern

GREEK TRAGEDY INTO FILM

by Kenneth Mackinnon
Croom Helm
£22.50

'Tragedy is, broadly speaking, a coterie event in cinema circles,' says Kenneth Mackinnon. Greek tragedy even more so, and on the face of it a book about film versions of Greek tragedy would seem of strictly limited interest. Tragedy is dead, we hear, its cathartic essence superseded—for the children of Marx and Freud—by the bourgeois gratifications of melodrama. And if we persist in believing, despite evidence to the contrary, that cinema is a medium which privileges realism, can a filmed adaptation of an ancient and formalised theatre be anything more than a high culture artefact? Kenneth Mackinnon thinks it can. The argument of his fascinating book is that, far from being a moribund enterprise, the filming of Greek tragedy raises central questions about the relation of high to popular art, about 'realism' as a mode of cinematic expression, and about the relation of spectator and event in filmed theatre.

Greek tragedy, by its very formalism, compounds the problem of theatre into film. It was theatre in the round (or at least in a semi-circle); actors, exclusively male, wore masks; a chorus shuffled round making comments on the action, often of such fence-sitting equivocation as would shame a *Guardian* leader-writer. And the Gods mechanically descended. The evidence of what an original production looked like being sparse and contradictory, what is a film-maker—let alone a theatre director—to do with all this classical convention? Mackinnon identifies three options which he borrows from a writer on filmed Shakespeare, and adds one of his own.

The first covers those films which are transparently filmed theatre, from a 1927 *Prometheus Bound* in the ruins of Delphi to Tyrone Guthrie's stylised, colour-schemed version of *Oedipus Rex* in 1956, whose masks prompted

an inimitable stricture from *Films in Review* that they represented 'the debased imaginings of twentieth-century degenerates'. The book touches on, though inadequately examines, what seems to me a fundamental problem with such filmed theatre, which is that a moving camera creates a complicity with the spectator not available to the theatre audience—a problem implicitly recognised by those Hollywood showbiz musicals which ease the film audience from a general to a privileged point of view, paradoxically making another illusion out of the denial of theatrical illusion.

This perceptual shift perhaps accounts for the second, and commonest, form of filmed Greek tragedy: those films, notably of course the Cacoyannis trilogy of Euripides plays, which retain some of the theatrical conventions but set them off against a 'realistic' landscape. As Mackinnon points out, there is a revealing progression (or regression?) from the relatively stylised *Electra*, with its statuesque chorus of peasant women, through the close-up agonising of Katharine Hepburn and Vanessa Redgrave's *Trojan Women*, to the visual grandiosity of *Iphigenia*, which has the effect of ossifying a dramatist who was in fact 'challenging religious, moral and dramatic orthodoxies at every turn.' The insistence on cinematic reality undermines the credibility of the theatrical reality.

A third option is what Mackinnon calls the 'filmic mode', films like Liliana Cavani's *Cannibals* (an *Antigone* in modern Milan) or Jancsó's *Elektra* or Dassin's frenzied *Phaedra* (here given more than its due) which are less a rendering of an ancient drama than a reinterpretation of an ancient myth. The argument here seems on shakier ground, particularly in its view of melodrama as an appropriate mode for filming tragedy on the grounds that melodrama is now our most familiar form. But the emphasis on Greek tragedy as an interpretation of myth is the key to the book's final option, which Mackinnon terms 'meta-tragedy'. By this he means films which attempt a modern tragedy through a meditation on the meaning of the ancient tragedy which they claim to interpret. The audacity of Pasolini's *Oedipus Rex* has, after all, a historical provenance: Sophocles' version of the Oedipus story is substantially different (more 'modern') from that transmitted by Homer.

Mackinnon's extended analysis of Pasolini's troublesome film is characteristically lucid. The film's cyclical structure and multi-cultural reference, he suggests, can persuade us that far from acknowledging the death of

tragedy we should see in it a rich source for the creative interpretation of the persistence of myth. He sees in Pasolini's later *Medea* an unresolved conflict between the emergence of rational consciousness and the 'resilience of pre-rational, mythological consciousness'—a notion which would by no means have astonished the Greeks. And it is in cinema, with its often noted oneiric quality, that this conflict can perhaps be most fruitfully explored. It is a persuasive conclusion to a book not the least of whose merits is that, unlike so much writing on cinema, it is a pleasure to read.

DAVID WILSON

The secret person

THOROLD DICKINSON
The Man and His Films
by Jeffrey Richards

Croom Helm/£22.50

Thorold Dickinson's career is intermittently as interesting for the projects he abandoned as for those he realised. In 1939, for instance, he might have made *The Denham Studio Mystery*, a thriller in which a murder is committed during the filming of an epic. The epic was *I, Claudius* and it would have been the most economical Korda production ever as it was planned to give von Sternberg's incomplete footage and discarded sets their first exposure. Apparently the only thing that stopped it was the chance to direct *Gaslight* at three weeks' notice.

In early 1946 a Rank production instigated by the then Viceroy of India, Lord Wavell, to show the efficacy of the Raj, had to be relinquished for less felicitous reasons. Dickinson, with his wife Joanna and the novelist Joyce Cary, flew to India on a reconnaissance. As Jeffrey Richards puts it, 'The project began inauspiciously. Dickinson was bitten by a dog and had to undergo a painful fourteen-day course of injections in case the dog was rabid. Joanna Dickinson was hospitalised with food poisoning. The central feature of the Hindu temple they had chosen was a giant stone phallus, which it was thought would offend J. Arthur Rank... But most seriously, there was continual rioting and unrest... The Indian fleet mutinied while Dickinson was in the country.'

In 1950 Dickinson's prestigious Festival of Britain presentation of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was cancelled after the script had been completed and the sets designed, because

Associated British Pictures suddenly decided the cost would be too great.

Such disenchantments are of course the very fabric of filmmaking, and sometimes (though not always) better things leap in to take their place. It is the fate of Dickinson's completed films that makes him seem peculiarly ill-starred: the prints of his first masterpiece *Gaslight* being summarily impounded to clear the decks for George Cukor's remake, the mutilation of *The Next of Kin* for American distribution, the six-year delay in releasing his film about emergent Africa, *Men of Two Worlds*. The list goes on. It certainly seems no wonder that Jeffrey Richards (who interviewed Dickinson extensively ten years ago) was finally motivated to produce this book by a 1984 press announcement, 'Forgotten film director dies.'

'It was not literally true,' Richards protests, 'for he had remained up until the end an honoured and respected figure. But it was perhaps figuratively true, in the sense that his directorial career had ended in 1953, the department of Film Studies he had founded at University College, London, had been closed down and the cause of film education to which he had committed so much of his energy had suffered savage blows... Furthermore no one had yet succeeded in locating Dickinson securely in the story of the British film industry and British film culture.'

Basing his approach on interview material (his own and others') and drawing constructively from Dickinson's own writing, Richards has provided a very welcome portrait of a man whose aims perhaps exceeded his achievements but whose inspirational quality ought to be remembered. (Even here fate took a last glancing swipe at a film-maker of outstanding visual sophistication, for the book is most unapologetically printed.)

Born in 1903, son of an archdeacon and claiming descent from Lady Godiva and Thorold the dwarf of the Bayeux Tapestry, Dickinson belonged precisely to that generation of privileged liberals from which Grierson recruited most of the documentary movement and Michael Balcon moulded Ealing Studios. Had he become identified with either of these well-signposted institutions he would have been long since 'located', but Dickinson always trod a (somehow more exalted) path apart.

No doubt head-on involvement with the harsh realities of feature film production ('one long struggle between commerce and art,' he called it) would make any intellectual who engaged in it slightly dismissive of the docu-

mentary boys, but Dickinson displayed a grand superiority: 'I am one of those who had documentary thrust upon them. I did not take it up by choice... My first working contact with documentary was in the mid-30s when I guided John Grierson to cut 25 minutes out of BBC—*The Voice of Britain* after his distributor had rejected it on the grounds that it was "all knobs and washing". Then I persuaded Associated Talking Pictures, for whom I was editing fiction films at Ealing Studios, to take over the distribution.'

Michael Balcon worked with Dickinson on only two (albeit significant) occasions. He produced the successful wartime propaganda feature *The Next of Kin*, and he backed *Secret People*. Indeed he opened the doors of Ealing to the first-ever production not initiated by the studio, so that Dickinson could make the film he hoped would crystallise his whole philosophy as well as pushing British cinema in a new art-house direction away from slavish imitation of Hollywood. 'All too often he had been given scripts not of his own choosing, scripts not worthy of his great ability,' Balcon said. 'It seemed to me it would be a tragic loss if he were not able to go ahead.'

The reverse, alas, turned out to be the case, and Dickinson's own script was his downfall. Nigel Balchin actually pointed out its flaws three years before it went into production, but Dickinson refused to heed all criticism of this project. Not even the young Lindsay Anderson (brought in by Dickinson to write a book about the film's making) could save the intransigent idealist from himself. 'You had to play it his way,' Anderson bluntly stated.

Richards throws a fascinating light on Dickinson's entire career as well as this major miscalculation, when he demonstrates by direct reference to the films themselves that the idea at the root of *Secret People* was a recurrent theme throughout his work. Richards notices moreover that 'the films he took on at short notice and worked on at high intensity' (*Gaslight*, *The Queen of Spades*, *Hill 24 Doesn't Answer*) were among his best. Paradoxically, this advocate of the high culture was more successful when he relied on instinct and emotion than when he laboured intellectually for years. His key theme consequently explored an inner conflict of which he was never consciously aware. 'Hidden in each of us is a secret person brought out by circumstances,' Richards quotes from the preface to *Secret People*. 'This could be the motto that binds together his work into a coherent oeuvre.'

ELIZABETH SUSSEX

Poles at the NFT

SIR,—I refer to the article 'Polish Perspectives' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1986) and the protests surrounding the showing of the film *Dignity*: whether or not the South Bank was littered with Polish Solidarity Campaign (PSC) leaflets, Mr Rogerson's article was certainly littered with factual errors.

First, the PSC is not an émigré organisation: it comprises Britons and Poles who support the cause of human rights in Poland. Most of our members who attended the NFT that day were, as it happened, British. Secondly, and thirdly, our 'vociferous picket' was neither vociferous nor a picket. We handed out our leaflets quietly to those entering or leaving the NFT to inform them of the nature of the film *Dignity* (i.e. totalitarian propaganda, a view not very different from Mr Rogerson's 'crude propaganda') and the situation in Poland. We were not trying to dissuade people from attending the screening, as we ourselves were going to attend: hence the leafleting was *not* a picket. Fourthly, there was a 'vociferous picket', but this was held by a different pro-Solidarity organisation, 'Solidarity with Solidarity', also not an émigré

organisation. (So much for Mr Rogerson's seemingly knowledgeable comments about émigré communities having their own dynamics and obsessions.)

Mr Rogerson's judgment seems as confused as his facts. The NFT admitted to 'Solidarity with Solidarity' (sws) that they wanted to show *No End*, and were only allowed to do so by the Polish Cultural Institute (i.e. the Polish Embassy) on condition that they showed *Dignity* and *A Looming Shadow* as well. As the NFT had not seen *Dignity*, the programme assessments were presumably written by the Polish Embassy (this seems to be confirmed by Mr Rogerson's article). This was not made clear in the NFT booklet.

In other words, the NFT was forced to show a 'crude propaganda' film it did not wish to show, by the embassy of the regime that had made that film, and the NFT gave the film an attempted credibility by using the assessments of the notes supplied by that embassy (without identifying these notes as being from the embassy).

Can anyone believe that no propaganda advantage was attempted by this process? Would the NFT allow other countries to manoeuvre them in a similar

manner (e.g., allow the South African Embassy to force them to show a pro-Apartheid film, described in the NFT booklet as 'the other side of the Apartheid coin')?

Most surprisingly, Mr Rogerson suggests there was no reason for PSC to worry about an attempted propaganda advantage, as Mr Wionczek, director of *Dignity*, was given a hard time by the audience in the question session afterwards. It is precisely *because* PSC members, and others who objected to the film and its showing at the NFT, turned up and made their views known, that Wionczek was given a hard time, and any attempted propaganda advantage was reduced.

As an NFT member for 18 years, I remain,

Yours in Solidarity,
GILES HART
Polish Solidarity Campaign
London

EDWARD ROGERSON writes: Before the screening of *Dignity*, a Pole from the PSC handed me a leaflet which sought to dissuade me from attending the film. Whether this is picketing, or leafleting, is a matter of semantic debate. I did not approach the 'vociferous' protestors close enough to verify their provenance. I am happy to accept that they were not members of Mr Hart's organisation. As to my supposed errors of judgment, I simply do not accept Mr Hart's interpretation of my opinions. I did not say that no propaganda advantage was sought; I said it was difficult to believe that advantages accrued as a result of the screening.

Ancient Britons

SIR,—Four years ago, during the seminar that accompanied the BFI's season of Soviet films of the 1930s, I remarked that the British cinema of that period was, if anything, even more of an unknown quantity to us than that of the Soviet Union. At this, one of those chairing the discussion (an individual who holds a senior position within the BFI) snorted 'Good thing too', or words to that effect. Considering such a complacent remark from one who should know better, it is not surprising that it has taken the British Film Institute half a century to notice those films that were being made right under its nose by Bernard Vorhaus during the years immediately following the Institute's inception in 1933. I therefore hope that before the BFI starts praising itself too enthusiastically for its part in eventually 'discovering' him, it might first pause to consider how his films came to spend so many years gathering dust in the Archive in the first place.

A further example of the BFI's

enterprising attitude towards our native cinema is provided by the interval of almost 25 years that had passed since her last film before the *Monthly Film Bulletin* made the sensational discovery that the British film industry of the 50s actually harboured a woman director called Wendy Toye. Gosh!

Yours faithfully,
R. M. CHATTEN
Archway, London

Orson Welles

SIR,—Your letter writer Barry Wilkinson (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn 1986) was almost entirely correct about the nature and contents of the novel trailer for Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, except that Welles gives his name at the beginning.

Yes, copies do exist. It was shown on the US Public Television series *Sneak Previews* in October 1981 and I recorded it on my VHS recorder.

Should Mr Wilkinson, or anyone else, care to have me duplicate it for them, they need only send me a blank tape and postage.

Yours faithfully,
HUGH K. BLACK
960 Maitland Street
London, Ontario
Canada N5Y2X4

Operation Julie

SIR,—One small correction to Quentin Falk's piece about Bob Mahoney and Dirk Bogarde. *Operation Julie*, although accurately described as directed by Bob and produced by Keith Richardson, was in fact made by Tyne Tees, in conjunction with Chatsworth. It was not a Yorkshire production.

Yours faithfully,
PETER MOTH
Tyne Tees Television

Film Festivals

SIR,—With regard to the article 'LFF thirty' in the 'Double Takes' section in the Autumn 1986 issue, I couldn't agree more with the statements about quantity over quality.

We have the same problem in Toronto every September when the Festival of Festivals (pretentious name: every film festival should be geographically defined) takes place. The organisers proudly advertise its claim to be the largest public film festival by the nature of its title, with emphasis on increases in film selection and attendance records.

Please don't misunderstand, the festival has had its fair share of gems: *Doctor Vlimmen*, *Scum*, *The Beads of one Rosary*, *Pixote*, *Blood Simple*, *The Hit*, *No Surrender*, *Thérèse*, *Mother Teresa*, any shorts by Les Blank. The glut of mostly unmemorable material has come to the point



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where quantity smothers quality. This obsession with the numbers game is at the point of ludicrousness.

As indicated, the LFF has experienced this, and I am sure other festivals follow the same practice. Most festival boards despise this truth.

Yours faithfully,
HELMUTS DRENGERS
Ontario
Canada

Schalcken the Painter

SIR,—I was so pleased to see John Howkins writing in praise of *Schalcken the Painter*. I've only seen it once, years ago, but it has haunted my imagination as much as anything I've ever watched on television (or in the cinema, come to that). I occasionally describe it to people, but with little hope that they'll ever get to see it—in fact, until I saw this article, I was beginning to wonder if it had ever existed. (But surely Peter Greenaway

knows it?) Without having anything to add or detract from Mr Howkins' subsequent arguments, I rest my case with that pleasurable shock of recognition, when that which was lost is found.

Yours faithfully,
J. D. WILSON
Whitstable, Kent

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PETER BRUNETTE has written extensively on the cinema for American film magazines. His book on Rossellini is being published by the Oxford University Press... MICHEL CIMENT is editor of *Positif* and author of books on Rosi, Kubrick and Boorman... NINA DAVIES is editor of *AIP & Co*, the journal of the Association of Independent Producers... SYDNEY HIGGINS has edited *The Private Diaries of Sir Henry Rider Haggard* and is the author of *Rider Haggard: The Great Storyteller*... GERALD PEARY is a Contributing Editor of *American Film*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Smooth Talk*, *Le Rayon Vert*, *La Femme de l'Aviateur*, *Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune*.

CANNON for *Thérèse*, *Le Beau Mariage*, *Pauline à la Plage*.

COLUMBIA-CANNON-WARNER for *Castaway*, *True Stories*, *'Round Midnight*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *The Hour of the Star*.

CURZON FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Comrades*.

ENTERTAINMENT for *Miss Mary*.
HANDMADE FILMS for *Withnail and I*.

THE OTHER CINEMA for *Themroc*.

RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for photograph of Lynda Myles.

UK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *The Fly*, *Aliens*, *Blue Velvet*, *The Color of Money*.

VIRGIN FILMS for *Gothic*.

RECORDED PICTURE CO for *The Last Emperor*.

SILVER FILMS for *A Kind of English*.

UMBRELLA FILMS for *Nanou*.

ZENITH PRODUCTIONS/SAM GOLDWYN CO/CHANNEL 4 for *Prick Up Your Ears*.

BEIJING FILM STUDIO for *A Girl of Good Family*.

EDEN FILM for *The Inuit*.

FILM POLSKI for *Hero of the Year*.

GREEK FILM CENTRE for *The Beekeeper*.

MAFILM V for *The Bitter Truth*.

MOSFILM for *Farewell*.

ORION PICTURES for *Something Wild*.

SWEDISH FILM INSTITUTE for *The Prisoner of Karlsten Fortress*.

RAI for *Julia and Julia*.

SYGMA/MARIO TURSI for *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

VISNEWS for illustrations for 'Today's News Today'.

BBC ENTERPRISES for *Smart Money*.

KEVIN BROWNLOW for *The Lady of the Dugout*.

PETER BRUNETTE for photograph of Suso Cecchi D'Amico.

GEORGES MERAN for *Intolerance at Avignon*.

STEN M. ROSENBLUND for photograph of Hal Roach.

NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *Casablanca*, *The Ghost Camera*, *Cotton Queen*, *The Last Journey*, *Street Song*, *Crime on the Hill*, *The Spiritualist*, *So Young So Bad*, *I Soliti Ignoti*, *Le Notti Bianche*, *The Big Knife*, *None But the Lonely Heart*, *The General Died at Dawn*, *Wild in the Country*, *Sweet Smell of Success*, *Deadline at Dawn*, versions of *She*, photograph of Hal Wallis, *We come, But No Unauthorised Admission*.

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ON NOW

●HEAVENLY PURSUITS

(Recorded Releasing)

Irresistible basic idea about a Catholic school in Glasgow whose patron, the blessed Edith Semple, needs to be credited with two more miracles to be posthumously dubbed a saint. While interested parties are praying for help in this game of religious green stamps, a remedial teacher (Tom Conti) is performing miracles of his own, and definitions of the miraculous lead to a frantic clash of cross-purposes. Treated with serious tongue-in-cheekness, the dilemma pays tribute to a quirk of the Scottish temperament ('Scotland's a hard-headed country when it comes to believing'). But the real joy of the film is the way writer-director Charles Gormley lends his sympathy and understanding to all his characters. Marvellous performances, especially from the kids. (Helen Mirren, Brian Pettifer.)

●INSPECTOR LAVARDIN

(Artificial Eye)

Chabrol stakes out his familiar territory with the opening murder of a stout paterfamilias, found obscenely naked on the beach after exerting his influence to ban a play ('Our Father Who Farts in Heaven') on the grounds of blasphemy. But as Inspector Lavardin (returning for a second case after *Poulet au Vinaigre*) begins his investigations, haunted by amorous memories of the victim's widow, unexpected directions emerge out of the typically torrid tangle of bourgeois family relationships. The widow serenely languishing (Bernadette Lafont), the former husband supposedly dead but still lurking, the poofter uncle who paints glass eyeballs by way of hobby (a stunning performance by Jean-Claude Brialy), the teenage daughter flirting with disco drug-pushers—all prove to enshrine a kind of innocence that forces Lavardin to exact vigilante justice on corruption in high places. Chabrol is indeed alive and well... (Jean Poiret, Jacques Dacqmine.)

●SHE'S GOTTA HAVE IT

(Recorded Releasing)

The lady is a tramp, and after listening to urgent special pleadings from a trio of male suitors and a lesbian charmer, decides that's just the way she wants it. Made in 12 days on a derisory budget, this debut feature by black US independent Spike Lee is oddly (and attractively) Brechtian in its formalised attitude to reality, its selective use of props (like the heroine's vast, candle-ensconced altar of a bed), its willingness to have the cast buttonhole the camera, and its solitary sunburst of colour (otherwise the visual message is that black and white

really is beautiful). Above all, it's characterised with witty complexity as the heroine sifts through an irresistible display of passions and proposals, aimed at mobilising her instincts for marriage, maternalism and upward mobility, before deciding that sexuality is too much fun to give up. (Tracy Camila Johns, Tommy Redmond Hicks.)

ALMOST YOU

(Recorded Releasing)

Rich New Yorkers, in a 'La Ronde' spin, quip about each other and wish they could get more from life. Slight; but Brooke Adams, Griffin Dunne, Karen Young and Marty Watt are good company. (Director, Adam Brooks.)

COMING UP ROSES

(Mainline)

A projectionist and an usherette start a clandestine mushroom farm in a disused South Wales cinema. A sly, open-ended Welsh-language comedy, directed by Stephen Bayly, which treats its twin subjects of unemployment and broken dreams with a wry lack of sentimentality. (Dafydd Hywel, Iola Gregory.)

'CROCODILE' DUNDEE

(UKFD)

Romancing the Stone crossbred with *Tarzan's New York Adventure*, as he-man of the Outback Paul Hogan finds love in the Big Apple. A few nice one-liners do not elevate the unappealing Hogan. (Director, Paul Faiman.)

DANCING IN THE DARK

(Entertainment)

Pretentious Canadian attempt to do an Ingmar Bergman on the inner world of a wife who, after twenty years of devotion to house and home while yearning for a life of showbiz glitz, suddenly ups and stabs her husband. He'd been unfaithful, and who—given the insufferable tedium of the lady—could blame him? (Martha Henry, Neil Munro; director, Leon Marr.)

EAT THE PEACH

(UIP)

A shaggy Irish tale about the building of a motorcycle wall-of-death in the middle of the Bog of Allen. Despite the presence of some stage Irishmen, this gentle, nicely judged comedy on the theme of human resilience has a taking particularity. (Stephen Brennan, Eamon Morrissey; director, Peter Ormrod.)

EXTREMITIES

(Entertainment)

Woman threatened with rape turns the tables on her attacker, with the latter only narrowly escaping burial alive in the garden. High-powered stage adaptation with striking central performances, but hampered by unreconstructed theatrical convention and rather dated rhetorical writing. (Farrah Fawcett, James Russo; director, Robert M. Young.)

THE FLY

(UKFD)

Two H. G. Wells' 'teleportation pods' have a messy effect on a

poor pathfinding baboon; however, scientist Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum), believing himself crossed in love, steps tipsily into his world-shaking device. Slowly mutating into the fly which has joined him, Seth plays his computer like an organ; his girl (Genna Davis) regards this melancholy spectacle with spaniel eyes. Tightly paced, stylish acrobatics, cowgum gore. (Director, David Cronenberg.)

FROG DREAMING

(ICA Projects)

Australian mystery adventure in which early teenage hero uncovers the eerie secret of an uncharted Outback lake. Background observed with laconic humour, narrative unfolded with fast-moving skill: family entertainment in the best sense. (Henry Thomas, Tony Barry; director, Brian Trenchard-Smith.)

HALF MOON STREET

(Rank)

Muddled adaptation of Paul Theroux's novel *Dr Slaughter*, about a pretty American political economist in London who opts for a second string career as a callgirl, thereby becoming involved in murky Arab-Israeli diplomatic skulduggery. Spurious in atmosphere and intellectual chitchat, it emerges as a bland espionage thriller-cum-romance. (Sigourney Weaver, Michael Caine; director, Bob Swaim.)

LABYRINTH

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

Wilful teenager wends her way through riddles and deceptions to recover her baby brother from the goblin clutches of David Bowie. Brian Froud's designs borrow from Escher and Sendak to create a no-man's-land from which slapstick dexterity has banished all trace of real magic. (Jennifer Connelly, Toby Froud; director, Jim Henson.)

MALCOLM

(Enterprise)

Nearer Bill Forsyth than Paul Cox, this Australian comic heist has Colin Friels as a reticent young genius who helps rob a bank via remote control. Lindy Davies and John Hargreaves are Malcolm's partners in crime, but the film is stolen by the robot ashtrays who execute the robbery. Quietly pleasant, if a bit drab. (Director, Nadia Tass.)

THE NAME OF THE ROSE

(Rank)

Long, slow and murky in more ways than one, this adaptation of Umberto Eco's unlikely bestseller of a medieval detective story may announce itself as a palimpsest of the novel but emerges as little more than a hodge-podge. (Sean Connery; director, Jean-Jacques Annaud.)

THE PRINCES

(Contemporary)

Colourful, episodic account of the loves and feuds of a gypsy community in the wastelands of a Paris suburb. Created with a fine eye for composition by self-styled former delinquent Tony Gatlif, it's more skilful melodrama than raw neo-realism, an earthy and often surprisingly comic

celebration of the subversive Romany spirit. (Gérard Darmon, Muse Dalbray, Céline Miltion.)

RUNNING SCARED

(UIP)

Chicago plainclothes buddies track down dope-runners amid a plethora of facetious badinage and fantastical action set pieces. Carried off with faceless gloss, though it hardly requires the cops' trip to Florida to point up the debt to *Miami Vice*. (Gregory Hines, Billy Crystal; director, Peter Hyams.)

SAVING GRACE

(Rank)

Rambling sentimental comedy, with Tom Conti affecting a tiresome Italian accent as the 'Orphan Pope' who goes AWOL to find God in man in a remote, poverty-stricken village. More sleeping-draught than balm to the spirits. (Fernando Rey, Erland Josephson; director, Robert M. Young.)

TAI-PAN

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

The first western feature shot partially in mainland China turns out to be an inflated imitation of *The Onedin Line*, with Bryan Brown building up his shipping company between arguments with his slave/mistress Joan Chen and violent clashes with the dastards commanding a rival outfit. Mini-series kitsch, which shortchanges on the spectacle. (Director, Daryl Duke.)

THE TOXIC AVENGER

(Blue Dolphin)

A nerd who falls into a vat of toxic waste emerges as a vigilante superhero: an ultra-cheap splatter comedy from the people who gave you *The Class of Nuke 'Em High*. (Andree Miranda, Mitchell Cohen; directors, Michael Herz, Samuel Weill.)

THE TRANSFORMERS—THE MOVIE

(Rank)

Strident animated feature, based on popular Japanese toys and interminable American cartoon series, provides an ironic final role for Orson Welles as the voice of a leviathan robot pursuing the Matrix of Power. Visually energetic but wildly confusing. (Director, Nelson Shin.)

WHEN THE WIND BLOWS

(Recorded Releasing)

Nuclear Armageddon—The Cartoon. John Mills and Dame Peggy Ashcroft put on Ealing-style working class accents and give voice to an impossibly simple-minded old couple who try to muddle on shortly before and after World War Three. Well animated, but infuriatingly thin. (Director, Jimmy Murakami.)

THE WRAITH

(Premier Releasing)

Mystery car, formed by lights from the Arizona skies, avenges nasty excesses of hot-rod gang. Exceeding daft, but redeemingly played as pastiche (from *Duel to The Exterminator*) by a new Hollywood generation. (Nick Cassavetes, Charlie Sheen; director, Mike Marvin.)

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at Nyon, International Documentary Festival:

The French Swiss Television Award (TSR): HOME FROM THE HILL (Molly Dineen)

The Kodak Award:

THE PERSUADERS (Anna Raphael) – a graduate film

French Quality Award for 16mm short:

DISCOVERY OF GRAVITY (Gerry Feeney) – a graduate film

and the Bilan Ethnographique in Paris awarded a 'prix spécial' jury prize to the NFTS for AMIR (John Baily).

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